

Characteristics of the King of Nations

Epiphany Sun. – 01/08/23 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Psalm 72:1-15,17 Pastor Keith Besel

v.17, [Solomon speaks prophetically of the Messiah King,] **“May His name endure forever, His fame continue as long as the sun! May people be blessed in Him, all nations call Him blessed!”**

Introduction

- ⊗ Most of you know my favorite way to define the word “Epiphany”. It is, “Ah Hah!” And that makes the day of Epiphany – which was two days ago on January 6th – the day that the universal Christian Church gets to celebrate that, “Ah Hah!” God has fulfilled the project that He initiated all the way back with Abraham.
 - Actually it starts even before that, when God makes the world, because from the very beginning God always wanted to have an intimate fellowship with the entire world. It’s His! He makes it; owns it; loves it!
 - Because, you see, after the world rebels against Him, God doesn’t want – or plan to capture it back just a little bit; only a portion of the world. No, He’s after the whole thing. So He calls Abraham and promises in Genesis 22:(17-18) that He is going to make Abraham a blessing not just to his immediate family; not only for a few, but to “all nations”.
- ⊗ Isaiah 60:3 says, “Nations shall come to Your light, and kings to the brightness of Your rising”. Ah Hah! This is the promised Light of Yahweh revealed in Jesus’ birth into human flesh.
 - And verse six of our Epistle Reading reveals that the mystery of God’s grace declares that not only the Jews – but also the Gentiles (i.e. “all nations”) “are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel”.
 - And in our Gospel Reading “wise men” – some call these “magi” “kings”, travel from the east; far outside of The Promised Land and the nation of Israel, why? To find and worship the promised Christ as their own king, as our children depicted the story to us moments ago.
- ⊗ “Kings” responding to God’s prophetic Word through the prophets, and in our Psalm text, through the great King Solomon; now in search of a newborn King because they “saw His star” (Mt. 2:2); innocently interacting with a paranoid and evil king during their search; and then being told by God in a dream to keep the young king’s location a secret from that evil king; How can anyone say that God’s Word and our Savior’s story is boring?

I. Jesus Christ is King of Kings

- ⊗ To help us in our consideration of this prophetic, Savior-King today, I’ve chosen to focus primarily on the words of King Solomon in Psalm 72.
 - Solomon was a great king of Israel – many consider it a close contest between him and his father King David as to who was the penultimate king in the Old Testament. So if anyone knew what the position required, Solomon surely did. The Holy Spirit used Solomon’s experience, failures and strengths to lead him in revealing for us today exactly what the ultimate King would need and deserve.
 - When Solomon describes this King as not just being the king of the Jews but the King for “all nations” (v.17), that leaves only one possible candidate – and that’s Christ Jesus.
- ⊗ When Solomon ruled over Israel, he revealed both his strengths and weaknesses. And his greatest strength was his wisdom. In 2 Chronicles, chapter one, God appeared to Solomon and gave him an amazing and undeserved gift. God said, “wisdom and knowledge are granted to

you. ...such as none of the kings had who were before you, and none after you shall have..." (v.12).

→ The Bible gives us examples of Solomon's great judgement and wisdom, like the famous story in 1 Kings, chapter three, where two women both claim the same child as their own and he quickly finds out who the real mother is by threatening to cut the child in two.

- ✘ So Solomon starts this Psalm by praying that God will "give the king [God's] justice" (v.1). He knew that a "perfect" King would have to have a good sense of justice – to make decisions on what is right and wrong. That requires that His heart have a special focus toward the needy and afflicted; those who can't defend themselves.

→ He also knew that this king would need to be much stronger than he was. So he prays in verses 2 and 4 that God will grant this King God's very own righteousness. "Righteousness" means to have a rock-solid stance on what is right and wrong. The root of the Hebrew word means "to be straight". So as verse four describes the King "defending" and "delivering" the poor and needy so that their "oppressor" will be "crushed", it's clear that this King must be unwavering in His integrity and strength.

→ One thing I've always found a bit strange about Solomon is the fact that even though he was wise, he definitely lacked in righteousness. 1 Kings 11 tells us that he had 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines. His wives are the ones who turned his heart toward false gods so that his heart was not fully devoted to Yahweh as his God.

- ✘ So it's a testament to the Holy Spirit's guidance, that Solomon knew in verse five that the future King would endure as long as the sun; as long as the moon; through all the generations of this earth! And verse 17 shows that His name will "endure forever"! So the kingdom we're talking about goes far beyond the space and time of this earthly existence. His is an eternal kingdom!

→ Again, that leaves only one option doesn't it? This King is God Himself!

II. We think we're kings/queens of our world.

- ✘ But that leaves out not only King Solomon; not only every other human king or queen, president or governor or ruler; it excludes you and me as well. Because admit it folks, no matter what station of society you and I are in, deep down we still want to at least be in charge of things in our own lives, don't we? We've wanted to be ruler over our own little "kingdom" since early childhood as we fight for our own side of the bedroom, or a later curfew time or whatever form of independence we seek from parents, teachers, employers, governments and more.

→ But in order to truly be king; that is to "rule" over others in your household and/or world, it automatically requires at least some bit of compassion or care for those who are weaker and needier than you. If you're a parent, when your infant wakes you up in the middle of the night, you know it does no good to get angry at him. You need to compassionately take care of him. You need to judge correctly. Or when someone asks you for advice regarding his/her marriage, you need to listen to the facts and give the correct advice based soundly on God's Word.

- ✘ Being king means you can't just think that people are here to serve you. It requires that you be willing to serve others; to share with them from the riches you've been given – your wisdom, your work, whatever – to enrich their lives as well. A true and faithful king must be able and willing to face evil head on; to call it out and expose it for what it is. It means making the effort to win people to your way of thinking; to conquer your own internal enemies so that they do not become a roadblock to helping others. And yes, that requires God's "righteousness"; a clear and solid alignment with the will of God. That's what it takes to be a godly King.

✘ So guess what, as I look at you and myself in the mirror, I realize that we don't have any kings or queens here in this congregation! Though we should be kings, we only act like Solomon. Instead of serving with what God has given us to make others rich, we get jealous of what other people have so that we often expect them to somehow make us rich. So in the end, we sinfully look more like cowards who are unwilling and too afraid to fight evil. And for that, as the Bible says, we all deserve to die.

→ We may not have hundreds of spouses like Solomon, but we have all married thousands of other priorities rather than God. So, worse than Solomon, we become fools who like to act like we're wise, even though we often don't open and know our Bibles enough to even accurately believe and express the basics regarding our true King and Savior, and all that He has done for our salvation and forgiveness and eternal life.

III. God sent us a real King.

✘ So, thanks be to God, that over 2,000 years ago He sent us the King of whom Solomon speaks in Psalm 72 – and His name is Jesus Christ. John's Gospel says of Him, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn. 1:14). Everything that Solomon wishes for and describes that is needed of the King is fulfilled in Jesus.

✘ Let's quickly run through the main characteristics that Solomon gives to us.

→ We've already talked about and spent more than enough time on the characteristic of God's righteousness, which Jesus has because He is God.

→ Verse two speaks of the King judging with "justice". Jesus was able to perfectly judge situations and people's hearts at a moment's notice. Think for example of the woman caught in adultery in John, chapter eight as she's about to be stoned by the Pharisees. Jesus said, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (Jn. 8:7). Jesus defended this sinner against equal sinners so He could forgive her and save her from hell.

→ Verse four says that He fights God's enemies. Jesus fought the devil in the wilderness; in and among His disciples and the people to whom He ministered. And ultimately, when He took the sin of the entire world upon His shoulders to expunge our permanent record before God, He fought and conquered all evil by allowing Himself to die in our place.

→ Verse six describes the future King as being "like rain (that) falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth". This is the picture of Christ's abundant love and grace that pours over us in our baptism; in the Lord's Supper and in every word of Holy Scripture. This is a King who gives us everything we will ever need for life today and for eternal life in heaven.

→ Verse eight describes His reign with "endurance". He is not just one in a line of more kings to come. He is "the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Rev. 22:13). As He ascended to prepare our place in heaven He assured us, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt. 28:20).

→ Verses 9 through 11 explain that the King deserves, and will ultimately receive worship and praise from all people of all nations. Solomon was so well known and admired that 1 Kings 10:1-10 describes how the Queen of Sheba came to hear and see him and bring him extravagant gifts. But even that queen knew where the praise and worship must always be directed, for she said, "Blessed be Yahweh your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel!" (1 Kg. 10:9).

✘ As sinful as he was, Solomon still knew that the future King deserved far greater praise and worship than any mere man as he was. In verse 11 he says, "All kings fall down before Him, all

nations serve Him!” The point is that people from all over the world would come and honor this King – and for good reason.

→ This is the primary “Ah Hah” that we celebrate on Epiphany Sunday. When Jesus, the true King was born, God came bursting into the dark chaos of this world. And in the midst of that chaos, what most people thought of as an ordinary, predictable thing happened: a star rose. But this star grabbed the attention, not of the Jews – God had already tried that through the prophets, but John 1:11 says that “He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him”. So God came to those outside of Israel and Judea; to some “wise men” from the east. Our Gospel Reading says that they saw His star and followed it all the way to Jerusalem and beyond to Bethlehem. And “when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh” (Mt. 2:10-11).

→ These distinguished men came from the east. They are Gentiles, not Jews. So, this Child did not come only as the King of the Jews. He came to be the King of kings; the King of the world; the King over all! In verse 17 Solomon says, “May people be blessed in Him, all nations call Him blessed”.

- ⊗ This prediction has come true today for you and me as well. In Jesus we see what is described in verses 12-14 all come true. Not only does He help and deliver and show mercy to the needy and poor and oppressed in a worldly sense, but He rules and conquers and redeems and feeds and loves and saves us all as those who are spiritually poor and needy and oppressed.

Conclusion

- ⊗ Yes, we have the one perfect King who rules over mayors, governors, Presidents, kings, queens, and all of us. This King uses His wisdom and righteousness; all of His divine power and gifts to take care of poor and needy sinners like you and me – giving us His own holiness and righteousness. Best of all, His Kingdom lasts forever! Jesus is the King of kings; our King! We lay all of our crowns at His feet. Amen.