

- <sup>1</sup> *Clap your hands, all you nations;  
shout to God with cries of joy.*
- <sup>2</sup> *For the LORD Most High is awesome,  
the great King over all the earth.*
- <sup>3</sup> *He subdued nations under us,  
peoples under our feet.*
- <sup>4</sup> *He chose our inheritance for us,  
the pride of Jacob, whom he loved.*
- <sup>5</sup> *God has ascended amid shouts of joy,  
the LORD amid the sounding of trumpets.*
- <sup>6</sup> *Sing praises to God, sing praises;  
sing praises to our King, sing praises.*
- <sup>7</sup> *For God is the King of all the earth;  
sing to him a psalm of praise.*
- <sup>8</sup> *God reigns over the nations;  
God is seated on his holy throne.*
- <sup>9</sup> *The nobles of the nations assemble  
as the people of the God of Abraham,  
for the kings of the earth belong to God;  
he is greatly exalted. (Psalm 47)*

### Why Should We Sing for our King?

Have you ever serenaded anybody? Have you ever just appeared outside someone's home and sung to them? If you include Christmas caroling, many of us probably have. But outside of that, very few of us have actually done that. Even though a young man serenading a love interest happens on TV, it doesn't happen much in real life. How about serenading a president? Have you ever done that? It used to be a somewhat popular thing to do. Abraham Lincoln was serenaded several times during the Civil War. Thousands of volunteer soldiers gathered outside the White House early in war and sang, "We're coming, father Abraham, we're coming!" He was serenaded after several major union victories. After the Emancipation Proclamation thousands of freed slaves gathered outside his window and sang to him. And Lincoln isn't the only one. It actually happened to a number of presidents and even to other prominent politicians in the past. Today it would be pretty hard to do. Security is much tighter. You'd never even get onto the grounds of the White House. But in a simpler time, it was considered to be a way to pay tribute to the leader of your country.

Why am I bringing all this up? Because Psalm 47, the word of God we're considering this morning, says, "**Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises.**" In fact, the whole psalm is really a song of praise to God the King. The book of psalms was the hymnal of the Old Testament. Today, we still do sing praises to God, even using some of these ancient psalms. But why? Today is Christ the King Sunday, so as we consider this psalm it's natural for us to ask: **Why should we sing for our King?**

#### I.

**Because he is a King like no other.** Psalm 47 tells us that God is King over all the earth. Now, most of the time in the Bible "God" by itself means God the Father. That's pretty much the way we think of it. I once preached a sermon in which I said that God died on the cross – meaning God the Son, Jesus. After church, someone asked me about that because they heard me saying that God the Father died with Jesus on the cross. That's how common it is for the Bible to use "God" for the Father. But we have to be careful not to insert that idea of the Father with the word God when it doesn't belong there. The Old Testament often refers to God as the King. In the ancient world, kings did two things, in addition to ruling: they led the army and they dispensed

justice. The Old Testament often pictures God ruling. It also pictures him as the leader of the armies of heaven – which doesn't come out very clearly in the NIV because of the way they translate the expression "the Lord of hosts." And the Old Testament calls God the judge of all the earth. In the New Testament, that role of ruler and judge and leader of the heavenly armies is directed primarily at Jesus. That's why today is Christ the King Sunday and not God the King Sunday. Jesus rules all things for our good. Jesus will return at the head of the hosts of heaven. Jesus will judge the world. So when we read this psalm, it's not wrong for us to see Jesus as the King here, because the New Testament makes that application for us.

Which of those royal functions does the King do in this psalm? Verse 3 says, "**He subdued nations under us, peoples under our feet.**" It's talking about the armies of Israel defeating their enemies under King David. But David always recognized who won their battles for them: God. Verse 8 says, "**God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne.**" It goes on to picture the whole world gathered before him which at least reminds us of Judgment Day. So all three functions are here. God – specifically, God the Son, Jesus – is the great King. He defeats his enemies. He judges the world. He rules the world. And Psalm 47 lifts up a song of praise to him, just like we did a few minutes ago when we sang one of my favorite hymns, "Crown him with many crowns."

But that hymn also goes where our gospel lesson for today goes. Many times the Bible simply praises God for being great, like this psalm does. But what does that greatness really consist in? What makes our God different from any other concept of God? Even the Greeks and the Romans praised their gods for their supposed power and glory. But the gods they invented were petty, jealous beings who toyed with people and who fought amongst themselves. The ancient world was often more concerned about keeping the gods pacified than about actually knowing and loving them. Christianity was revolutionary because it teaches that God is good and loving and full of mercy. None of the gods of the ancient world were like that. And none of the gods of today are rich in love and mercy in the same way that the God of the Bible is. Even Islam, which comes closest, emphasizes the power of God and his control even over evil much more than his love and mercy.

But our gospel lesson shows us a very different kind of God and King. It always strikes me that on the last Sunday of the church year, as the weather is turning cold and we're thinking about Thanksgiving and Christmas, we have a Lenten reading for our gospel lesson: Romans soldiers torturing Jesus and putting a crown of thorns on his head and mocking him, "**Hail, king of the Jews!**" No human king who ever ruled in this world would willingly submit to that kind of treatment. No president today would humiliate himself in that way if he could avoid it. Certainly, in the past, kings and presidents have been treated that way when they were captured by their enemies or fell from power. But that's not what happened to Jesus. The Romans didn't attack and capture him. Jesus simply handed himself over to them. Jesus provoked the Jewish leaders into arresting and killing him at the one time they did not want to do that. They wanted to wait until the Passover was over and the crowds had gone home and they could avoid a riot. But Jesus forced their hand. Jesus wanted to be treated like that. And Jesus wanted the crucifixion and death that came after. Why?

Because he is the King who dies for his people. The only way for anyone to get to heaven was for Jesus to pay for their sins. That reality lies behind everything that the Bible says. God is the Judge. God wrote the laws that all human beings have to obey. God knows that every single one of us sins every single day. We sin out of habit and out of choice. We do things that we should not do. We leave undone things we should be doing. We sin thoughtlessly and we sin with great deliberation and even zeal. And every single one of us deserves to die and spend eternity in hell. The only person who could rescue was God – the very Judge who condemns us. So God the Father sent God the Son into the world to free us. God the Son took on a human nature and was born in a stable. God the Son lived as a poor man and experienced everything that is hard about this life. God the Son in human flesh died and paid for all the sins of all the world. That's the kind of King he is. He cares nothing for himself. He loves us. He is a King like no other. He deserves every song we could possibly raise to him and more.

## II.

But it isn't only the way he won his kingdom that makes Jesus unique. It's also the extent of his kingdom. Do you know what the largest empire in human history was? It wasn't the Roman Empire. The two candidates are the British Empire and the Mongol Empire. They used to say, "The sun never sets on the British empire," because they controlled territories all over the world. They had more total territory than anyone else ever controlled. The Mongols had the largest contiguous empire – the largest empire in which all the land was

together. But neither one came close to ruling the world. And neither empire lasted. But Jesus rules the world and he will forever. And he does something more – Jesus rules our hearts. That is a supreme achievement: the conqueror is beloved by those he conquers. The conqueror invites the conquered to be a part of his ruling people. So, **why should we sing for our King? Because he invites us into his kingdom.**

The beginning of this psalm focuses the Jewish people. God chose them out of all the nations of the earth. God chose this tiny, unimportant nation to be the cradle of the Savior. God chose them to receive the word of God and to know a loving God that the rest of the ancient world couldn't imagine. God even chose where they would live. The psalm calls the territory where they lived their inheritance and the pride of Jacob. God sent Israel there. But then the psalm moves beyond Israel. It speaks of God ruling over all people. The last verse says, **“The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth belong to God.”** The nobles of the nations are gentiles. “The nations” is actually what the word “gentiles” means. To the Jews, the gentiles were those people out there, the unclean ones, the unbelieving ones, the ones that God did not choose.

God says that those gentiles, those foreigners, are now part of the people of God. He is saying that people like you and me have a place at the table. Why? Because we deserve it? No. We're sinners. We already established that. Our own consciences testify to that fact, no matter how hard we try to deny it. Then, is it because there are just so many of us and it wouldn't be fair for God to only reveal himself to that tiny people? That's not it either. God doesn't owe us anything. But in love, he does want us all. That's the point. God saw us and knew us before he ever began to create. He made Adam and Eve simply to love them and their descendants. God loved us before we were ever born. God loved us before we could even begin to earn it. We call that grace.

Someone once said that the best human parallel to God's grace is the love of a mother for her child. I often make that point from the perspective of the sacrifices that moms make. When a baby cries in the middle of the night, mom gets up. It doesn't matter how tired she is. She gently cares for that baby. She soothes whatever is wrong. When a small child has a nightmare, mom comes to reassure him or her. When a child is sick, mom deals with all the disgusting details. That's all true. It's all a wonderful picture of God loving us when we're not cute, when we're ugly and sinful and messy and needy. But there's another part of the picture which this Old Testament psalm also touches: a mom loves her baby before she sees it. From the moment she knows she's pregnant, she changes her life for the good of that child. She prepares for it. She prays for it. She dreams about it, long before she can hold that child in her arms. She does that, even if she's spending hours every day eating crackers and trying not to run to the toilet.

God loved us before the world began. God loved us before we were conceived in our mother's wombs. God chose us to be his true people, the New Israel of God. Then God the Father sent his Son to live and die and rise so that we will reach eternal life. Then Jesus sent the Holy Spirit onto the Church so that we can carry the gospel forward. And God works through our preaching and he finds his chosen ones and he brings them into his people. He did all that for us. How can we not sing to a King like that?

Sing praise to your King. We don't really do that for our world leaders in America today. I suppose if the president were going to tour a high school, they might have their choir sing some patriotic song to welcome him. But I don't think we could organize several busloads of people from Livonia to go and serenade the president on the White House lawn. But here in the Church, we do sing for our King. Every time we sing a hymn, we are singing the praises of Christ the King. The King who laid down his life so his people will live. The King who wants all people everywhere to know him and live with him. **Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises.** Amen.