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The King in the Psalms

STUDY 1 – INTRODUCING THE KING

Introduction

We're about to embark on a journey exploring a kingdom—God's kingdom. The kingdom of God is an important theme running through the entire Bible. Perhaps you've noticed that the Bible is full of references to kings, kingdoms, ruling, reigning, and other royal activity. One of the first things Jesus says when He begins His ministry is, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel" (Mark 1:15). God is repeatedly referred to as "the LORD" in the Old Testament. The LORD puts kings on the throne to rule over His people. He sometimes fights against kings like in the story of the Exodus. Kings and kingdoms are all over the place in Scripture.

In this study, we are going to take some time exploring the picture of the King presented in the Psalms, but before we jump into that, let's take a few minutes to consider what comes to our minds when we think about kings and kingdoms.

OPENING ACTIVITY

Let's play a game of royal "MINUTE TO WIN IT." Each group is going to have one minute to name as many kings or queens as they can. Whoever comes up with the most at the end of one minute wins the game.

What did you come up with?

Why did those things come to mind?

With all these pictures in mind, let's jump into the Psalms now to see what kind of picture they paint of the King.

Scripture

One of the major themes in the Psalms is the theme of the Messianic King. Repeatedly in the Psalms you'll hear references to a King who is going to arrive on the scene and do some amazing things. To point out just a few examples: He'll save His people. He'll defeat their enemies. He'll rule forever. There are many places in the Psalms where you'll find God's people expressing their eager expectation for this King to come. God's people are waiting.

The first time we are introduced to the King in the Psalms is in Psalm 2.

Read Psalm 2:1-12 as a group.

At first glance, what do you notice about the king in this Psalm? What does the Psalm explicitly say about him?

Read Psalm 2:1-3 again.

What is the scene depicted in these verses?

Read Ephesians 6:10-13.

Read Romans 7:15.

Do you resonate either with what Paul says or what the Psalm writer says about the battle between God and Satan going on in the world? Why or why not?

Read Psalm 2:4-9.

How do you see the LORD'S power on display here?

What do these verses tell you about the King?

Ultimately, what will this King do to the enemies (the nations from verse 1) who stand against the LORD?

New Testament Connections

Let's put some flesh and bones to the King in Psalm 2. When Jesus arrives on the scene in the Gospels, a lot of what He talks about deals with the kingdom of God. Multiple times in the New Testament, Jesus Himself is referred to as the King who was expected to come. He's the same King from Psalm 2. Take a few minutes to explore some of the following references:

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What do each of these verses say about either the kingdom of God or Jesus as a King? What connections do you see between these verses and Psalm 2?

Mark 1:15

Matthew 6:33

Matthew 18:1-4

John 3:1-5

John 1:47-51

John 19:17-22

"I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord,

who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death,

that I may be his own and live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness,

just as he is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.

This is most certainly true."

What does this last line say?

What does it mean for you to take refuge in Jesus, the King?

Application

Read Psalm 2:10-12.

How does knowing that the King always wins change your outlook on the world and the way things seem to go in the world?

How do you experience the power of Jesus, the King, working in your own life?

In his explanation of the second article of the Apostles' Creed in the *Small Catechism*, Luther talks about what it means to live as a servant in Jesus' kingdom under His power and authority.

He says,

Wrap Up

Close with prayer.

CHALLENGE FOR THE WEEK

Spend just five minutes a day for the next week taking refuge in Jesus. You could take refuge in Him in a variety of ways. Use your responses from the last question of the study to get yourself started. If you don't know where to start, here are just a few suggestions:

1. Spend five minutes a day in prayer. (If you don't know what to pray, use Psalm 2 as an outline for your prayer.
2. Spend five minutes a day reading the Psalms that talk about God as a refuge. Here are seven of them, so you can use one a day.

Psalm 5, Psalm 25, Psalm 46, Psalm 61, Psalm 91, Psalm 118, Psalm 141

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STUDY 2 – THE KING RULES OVER CREATION

Introduction

We live in a world that is full of all kinds of beauty and majesty. You don't have to look very hard to notice the wonders of creation, either. They're all around us, right under our noses many times. Yet, at the same time, this impressively beautiful creation can be threatening and dangerous. The same things that lead us to stop and wonder can also cause us to cry out and sigh. On the same ocean there can be gorgeous sunsets and gigantic tsunamis. The same mountaintops can produce both panoramic views and perilous avalanches. Sunshine can give way to storm clouds sometimes in just a matter of minutes. Let's take some time in this study to explore both the wonders and dangers of this creation as well as the King who rules over it all.

OPENING ACTIVITY

- 1. Talk about a time when you were taken back by the beauty and majesty of God's creation. (This could be just about anything you found especially beautiful, breathtaking, marvelous, etc.) Consider these questions:**
 - What was that experience like?
 - How did it make you feel?
- 2. Share a time when you experienced creation in a negative way or point to an example of a time when you saw creation affect others in a harmful way. (This could be a natural disaster, really bad sunburn, a story you saw on the news, etc.)**
 - What did that experience feel like for you or how do you imagine it felt for others?

Scripture

God's Word has a lot to say about both the glorious beauty and the painful dangers of the things God has made. There are references all over the Psalms giving voice to the experiences of God's people. Check out just a few of them. Sometimes, the writers of the Psalms express their joy and awe at the things God has made.

Read Psalm 8:1-4.

Read Psalm 19:1-5.

Read Psalm 95:3-5.

Other times, they talk about the challenges of living in a creation that is fallen and broken. Sometimes they talk literally about the creation, but they also use storm and disaster imagery as depictions of their real-life struggles.

Read Psalm 93:3.

Read Psalm 46:2-3.

Read Psalm 57:1-2.

How do the experiences of the Psalm writers compare and contrast to your own experiences?

Read Psalm 24:1-2.

Read Psalm 93 (in its entirety now).

Read Psalm 96 (especially vv10-13 if you're short on time).

How in these verses (or in any of the verses referred to earlier) do you see creation serve the Lord, its King?

Application

One of life's most serious struggles involves the reality that bad things continue to happen even though we believe in a good God who has the power and authority over everything. Christians in every day and age have wrestled with why bad things happen. How do we begin to account for all of the natural disasters we hear about in the news? How do we make sense of the challenging things that happen in our own lives?

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Has there ever been a time in your life where you've questioned God? What was that like?

Have you ever witnessed some kind of natural disaster or other calamity and wondered how God could allow something like that?

New Testament Connections

Jesus' disciples found themselves in the middle of a natural disaster one time when they were out on the sea. It is in this moment that Jesus, the King of all creation, shows His power over the forces of creation and His presence in the midst of His follower's times of trial. Take a moment to read this story to see what the disciples ask Jesus and to see how Jesus responds.

Read Mark 4:35-41.

How are Jesus' disciples experiencing the forces of creation in this story?

How do they respond to their situation?

How does Jesus respond to them?

What does Jesus' response teach us about Him?

How might this story begin to change the way you view not only the disastrous events you see around the world but also the challenging times in your own life?

What difference does it make to you that you have a King like Jesus whose power extends over everything, including the forces of creation/nature?

Wrap Up

Close with prayer.

CHALLENGE FOR THE WEEK

Get outside this week! Whether it's warm and sunny or cold and rainy, spend some time in God's creation. Here are a few ideas for you.

1. Snap a photo of something in God's creation and share it with no filter. Thank the Lord for making it the way it is.
2. Find a comfortable, outdoor spot to pray for ten minutes or go for a prayer walk through your neighborhood or at a local park. Use your senses and thank God for things you experience when you're in His creation.
3. Find a way that you can care for what God has made. If it means just picking up the trash you see on the sidewalk as you walk through your neighborhood, go for it.

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STUDY 3 – THE KING CARES FOR THE LOWLY AND NEEDY

Introduction

My father always said that you could learn a lot about someone by how he or she treats those people underneath him or her. He's right. For example, you can tell what kind of a coach a person is by how he or she treats his or her players. You discover a lot about a boss by the way they interact with employees. Some of the world's best teachers are the ones who treat their students with the deepest respect. How you treat those below you says a lot about your character.

In this study, we are going to explore how Jesus, the King, treats the lowliest people in His kingdom. Specifically, we are going to look at how He shows His concern for those who have the greatest need.

OPENING ACTIVITY/DISCUSSION

1. **Talk about a teacher/coach/boss/other authority figure you've had in your life who treated people underneath them in a special way.**
 - **What made this person someone extraordinary to learn from, play for, work for, etc.?**
 - **What makes them different from others in their position?**
 - **How did they treat you and how did that make you feel?**
2. **Talk about a time when someone looked up to you as an authority figure.**
 - **What did that feel like?**
 - **How did you treat those people who were looking up to you?**

Scripture

The first reading we'll look at comes from Psalm 72.

What comes to your mind when you hear the words "justice" and "righteousness?"

Read Psalm 72:1-12, focusing especially on verses 4 and 12.

How does the King interact with the lowly and the needy in His kingdom?

What does this tell you about the King's character?

The King is a selfless King. He has an uncommonly big heart. He is willing to stick up for those who have no voice in society. He is willing to defend people who have no other defense. He cares about the ones no one else cares about.

New Testament Connections

Check out the following episodes from Jesus' life and ministry and talk and answer the following questions:

1. **How does Jesus show His concern for the needy in this story?**
2. **How is Jesus beginning to make everything right in this story? In other words, how does He show His righteousness?**

Read Mark 2:1-12.

Read Matthew 8:1-4.

Read Matthew 14:13-21.

Read Luke 7:11-17.

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The apostle Paul summarizes it this way:

“For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.” (Romans 5:17-18)

It is because Jesus has died and risen again to new life that a new kingdom is already here. It is a kingdom that includes all those who have been baptized into His death and resurrection (cf. Romans 6).

Based on the ways you see Jesus interacting with those on the margins of society and those in need, what kind of a King would you say He is?

What do Jesus’ actions say about His character?

Application

Let’s bring some of these ideas closer to home now. Sure, it’s great that Jesus has come as the King of righteousness who has already begun to make everything right by His death and His resurrection, but we continue to live in a world where a lot doesn’t go right. Life with parents can feel like a challenge. Relationships don’t always go the way we want them to. People disappoint us. School is hard. Calculus, am I right? Cancer happens. Loved ones pass away. There are so many times when this world and the people in it (ourselves included) just don’t work the way we believe they are supposed to. So, what do we do with what we’ve just learned?

In what ways does the world feel like it is a place where things go right? In what ways does it feel like the opposite?

These are questions and struggles that God’s people have wrestled with for millennia. Over and over, God’s people have wondered what to make of the reality that God has come in Jesus to make everything right and yet, the world is still filled with all kinds of brokenness.

Wrap Up

Close with prayer.

Read Psalm 72:1-14 as a prayer to conclude your time.

WEEKLY CHALLENGE

Write a prayer journal entry this week using Psalm 72 as your guide. Take time each day to pray for someone different who is in need of Jesus’ help.

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STUDY 4 – THE KING SAVES HIS PEOPLE

Introduction

In this study, we will explore this characteristic of the king: his ability to save. Repeatedly in the Psalms, the Messianic King is described as someone with the power to defeat the enemies of God's people. We will point to a handful of examples from the Psalms, connect these passages to what we see in Jesus, and make an application to our own lives as people who require Jesus to save us.

OPENING ACTIVITY

1. **Let's say your favorite pro sports team has just won the world championship (Super Bowl, World Series, NBA Finals, Stanley Cup, Premier League, etc.). If you got to plan the victory celebration and parade when the team got back to town (and money is no object) what would the victory celebration look like?**
2. **You personally just achieved one of your really important goals. (Maybe you got an A on a test. Maybe you got your driver's license. Maybe you got a job or an acceptance letter from a college.) What would you do to celebrate?**
3. **What is the most important symbol of accomplishment in your house/room right now? It could be a trophy, plaque, certificate, etc.**

Scripture

In the face of enemy threats, there are many Psalms that give voice to the people's cry for a savior.

Read Psalm 143.

Read Psalm 64.

Read Psalm 56.

Read Psalm 3.

What are the problems the writers of these Psalms are experiencing?

How are their enemies threatening them?

What kind of help are they asking from the Lord?

Application

In the *Large Catechism*, Luther talks about the daily attacks that God's people face. Luther says,

"Therefore we Christians must be armed and daily expect to be incessantly attacked, in order that no one may go on in security and heedlessly, as though the devil were far from us, but at all times expect and parry his blows. For though I am now chaste, patient, kind, and in firm faith, the devil will this very hour send such an arrow into my heart that I can scarcely stand. For he is an enemy that never desists nor becomes tired, so that when one temptation ceases, there always arise others and fresh ones."

Read 1 Peter 5:6-11.

How does Peter describe the ways Satan works to attack the people of God?

In what ways do you believe you have had to face the enemy?

What do you think it looks like to resist him, firm in faith?

How might the Psalms you read earlier help you when you face attacks from the enemy today?

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Psalms and New Testament Connections

Read the following passages that talk about a horn of God's victory and salvation.

Read Psalm 92:9-11.

Read Psalm 132:13-18.

What does God's victory look like in these passages?

Read the following New Testament verses.

Read Colossians 2:13-15.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-19, 25.

Read Romans 8:37-39.

How do you see Jesus' triumph over His enemies in these passages?

How have you experienced the victory of Jesus in your own life?

Wrap Up

Close with prayer.

WEEKLY CHALLENGE

Keep the victory of Jesus in front of you this week. Here are a couple ways you could do that.

Write Romans 8:37-39 on a piece of paper and hang it somewhere you'll see it. Put it in your locker, on your bedroom door, on the bathroom mirror, or wherever you know you'll see it several times a day. Instead of going the paper route, make Romans 8:37-39 the lock screen or the home screen of your phone, tablet or computer.

Praise God for the victory he won over sin, death, and the devil for you. The Psalms are filled with Psalms of praise that would be great ways for you to praise him for what he has done for you. Take one of the Psalms from this list and pray it every day this week.

Psalm 33

Psalm 65

Psalm 66

Psalm 98

Psalm 103

Psalm 148

Psalm 149

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STUDY 5 – THE KING’S KINGDOM INCLUDES ALL NATIONS

Introduction

In this study, we are going to unpack one final aspect of the king’s reign—the extent and the scope of His kingdom. We’ve talked about His rule over creation. Now we are going to zero in on the people over whom Jesus rules. When we look both at the Psalms and corresponding verses in the New Testament, we find that the kingdom Jesus comes to establish is much bigger than we could ever imagine, including people we least expect.

OPENING ACTIVITY

The following activity involves a series of pictures that show you just how big certain things are. When introducing this activity to the participants, it is important to name the item to be shown before showing it so participants develop an idea of how big they believe something to be before they actually see the picture that puts it in perspective.

Take a look through the following gallery of pictures.

1. The Pyramids of Giza
2. The actual flag that inspired the Star-Spangled Banner
3. Statue of Liberty torch
4. Wind turbine
5. Anchor chains
6. A snail
7. A sequoia tree
8. A saltwater crocodile
9. Japanese Spider Crab
10. World’s largest clock (in Mecca, Saudi Arabia)

Which one of these pictures surprised you the most? Why?

Scripture

When we dig into the extent and scope of the king’s kingdom in the Psalms, we find that it is bigger than any of us ever could have imagined. The kingdom the King comes to establish includes people others never saw coming. All nations are a part of this kingdom.

Check out these verses from the Psalms that talk about this.

Read Psalm 72:15-20.

Read Psalm 22:27-31.

Read Psalm 45:16-17.

What do these verses tell you about the king’s kingdom?

Why do you think it is important that this kingdom includes all nations, all generations, etc.?

New Testament Connections

Read Luke 2:25-32.

How does Simeon say that Jesus has fulfilled what had been prophesied about the coming King who would even be king over the Gentiles?

Read Luke 17:11-19.

Who is it that experiences the full effect of Jesus’ healing in this story?

Read Matthew 8:5-13.

How does this centurion fit into the picture of the kingdom for all nations?

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Application

We've already touched on this just a little bit, but the reality of a kingdom that includes all nations means that the kingdom includes you. It doesn't matter where you're from. It doesn't matter what you've done. Christ's kingdom is big enough to include you.

How do you see yourself fitting into Christ's kingdom?

What has Christ done in your life to make you a part of it?

The vastness of Christ's kingdom means that others are included in it, too. In fact, that means all of your brothers and sisters in Christ are a part of it. The people you like are a part of it as well as the people you don't. People who look like you are part of it as well as people who don't. Servants of the King come in all different ages, colors, ethnicities, and life experiences. This makes the kingdom of God a complicated thing sometimes. Whenever different and imperfect people get together, there is the potential for our sinful nature to rear its ugly head.

This has been an issue for the church since its inception. In fact, many of the letters the apostle Paul wrote addressed issues that arise when imperfect people from a variety of backgrounds are gathered together to live together as servants of the one true King.

Listen to some of the things he has to say to these churches and to us.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:10.

Read Romans 15:5-7.

Read Philippians 2:3-8.

What does Paul say it looks like for us all to live together as different people who all are still servants of the King?

How might you go about living in this way with those around you at your church, in your youth group, at your school, at your house?

Wrap Up

Close with prayer.

WEEKLY CHALLENGE

This week let's make our responses to that last question real. Find a way to count someone else as more significant than yourself. Get creative. If you need some help getting started, you can try one of these suggestions:

- Engage in a conversation with an older member of your church. Ask them some questions about their life of faith. You could ask them what Bible passage has been most meaningful to them or you could ask them to share the stories of some of the most powerful things the Lord has done in their life.
- Do something you know your parents want you to do without them asking you to do it.
- Talk to someone you wouldn't normally talk to at school.
- Let your sibling sit in the front seat all week.
- Ask your youth leader what you could do to help make his or her life easier. Offer to lead a prayer when you gather together, to send out invites to the next event, or make an announcement in church.