

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Psalm 99:1-9 and Matthew 17:1-13
Sermon Title: "A King to Rule over Us"

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{SLIDE 1} We don't know what it is like to have a king. We don't know what it is like to have a queen ruling over our land. Some countries have kings and queens, although they may not rule their countries with absolute power. They are only somewhat involved with their governments, and it is the elected politicians who makes most of the decisions.

A long time ago certain kings and queens in certain countries had complete sovereignty. The government, the economy, even the religion could change overnight, depending on who came to power. King Henry VIII, for example, completely denied the power of the Pope over his country. The Roman Catholic Church had no sway with him. Therefore, Henry VIII decided that he was the true ruler of England, and so he tweaked the government and the religious practices, and this is where the Church of England and the Episcopal Church started. At one point, King Henry was so determined to have absolute rule that he banned the practices of the Catholic Church, and began to rob Catholic abbeys and cathedrals of all their gold and

religious objects. I don't think England's modern-day monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, ever did such things.

{SLIDE 2} Some kings and maybe even queens were downright ruthless in the ways they ruled their countries. We may remember Queen Jezebel in the First Book of Kings, who had her own collection of Baal worshippers who tried to push out the worship of the only true God, YHWH. She would “pull the strings,” manipulate her husband, King Ahab, and create advantages for herself through his rule, such as stealing land from a common person and having him killed in the process.¹ Some Roman emperors could be ruthless in the way they held power. They could eliminate people if they didn't like the ways they looked or if they heard a rumor that somebody was trying to kill the Emperor. Caligula was one of those immoral kings of ancient Rome who ruled with brutality. I won't go into the details of the horrible things he did, other than to mention two things. One of ancient Rome's historians called Caligula a Monster, and he told the story of an extravagant banquet that Caligula held for all the government officials. Caligula burst out in loud laughter during this banquet, which made everyone stop talking. They look at him reclining on a couch next to two government officials

¹ Cf. 1 Kings 21.

and saying with glee in his voice, “What do you think? It occurred to me that I have only to give one nod [to my guards] and both your throats will be cut on the spot!”²

{SLIDE 3} Why do I mention any of this to you? Because Psalm 99 declares that “[the] Lord is king; let the peoples tremble!”³ How does that makes us feel? In light of mentioning Queen Jezebel and Caligula, we might not appreciate the first verse of Psalm 99. We might be terrified at the idea that the Lord is King. We might not completely understand what the next sentence means: “let the peoples tremble!” If the Lord God acts like a cruel, brutal monarch, then we are all lost. We would be shaking in our boots and try to flee to some dark corner of the world, hoping God never finds us. “The Lord is king; let the peoples tremble!”

There have been bad kings and queens in our history, but there have also been good kings and queens. There have been monarch who ruled with severe power and others who ruled with a kind and loving hand. And then there is the Lord our God who cannot be compared to any king or queen, bad or good. God cannot be compared to any ruler, whether born to the position or elected. God stands alone. God

² Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars* (kindle version), 2807.

³ Verse 1.

is all-powerful, all-sovereign. No one can dispute it; no one can fight it. And why would we, since we want our Lord God to be king and have complete rule over the world.

{SLIDE 4} What really frightens people about having the Lord God as our King? Maybe the main thing that concerns them is that they don't want God getting into their business. They might not want anybody bugging them, and they especially don't want God bugging them. They want to be the kings and queens over their own destinies. They want to do their own things and be left alone.

Sadly, it never works. We've talked about it over the last few weeks. We are unable to make ourselves perfect. We are unable to create the perfect lives, because even if we do we become bored with it. We don't think it is enough, and we always want more. If anything, we are good at messing things up. All creation is in a mess because of our selfishness. Wanting to be left alone to do our own thing never works. We cannot be the kings and queens over our lives.

{SLIDE 5} We need a King in our lives, an absolute Ruler who knows how to govern our lives. We need a Monarch who knows us through and through, a Royal

Figure who even made us, molded and shaped us before we were born, and gave us characteristics that are similar to the King's. We need a Monarch who continues to know our thoughts, feel our feelings, understand our desires, and direct our goals. The Lord our God is just that King. The Lord God who made heaven and earth, the Lord Jesus who sits on a royal throne to judge all the nations, and the Holy Spirit who gathers us to our God and gives us reason to worship. Our Lord is the perfect King; nobody else will do. The Lord is an absolute Ruler; nobody has the power, the glory, and majesty that our God has. The Lord God must be the King over our lives.

{SLIDE 6} But there still is the issue of trembling. "Let the people tremble," Psalm 99 says. Tremble as in be scared to death of God. Tremble as in be very afraid because we will never escape God being our King.

There is one meaning of the word *tremble* that suggests fear and quaking. It is a heavy thing for us to grasp, having God as our absolute Ruler, the One we turn to for everything, the One we live for in every moment of our lives. It could make somebody feel uneasy, especially if they want to rebel and live their own lives, which doesn't work. However, the word

tremble also translates as awe-struck, standing in awe, mouth gaping open, mind unable to grasp the full splendor and power of God. We cannot help but tremble when we think of God being in our lives, since God is so big and we are so small. God is so overwhelming and we are so insignificant. God is so in-control, and we are so out-of-control.

But this is what we want: Somebody is control of our lives. Somebody with all the answers, with whom we can speak when life gets overbearing. Somebody who can fix the bad situations we get ourselves into, especially when we cannot find the escape. Somebody who is going to love us no matter what, who will stick by us when others may not.

{SLIDE 7} You know, when I was a kid, I thought my parents pretty much had it altogether. They were older than me and presumably smarter than me, so I figured that when I became an adult I would have it altogether, too. I would be smarter and well-organized and even-tempered. Life would be good. But then there was a setback in my family, when my parents filed for divorce. I was in high school and my sister just barely in middle school (junior high). I started to learn that adults may be just as confused as children at times. Then I had to graduate and go off to college, and try to find a major that would eventually become

my career. That took a lot of work, and I found growing-up to be more difficult than I imagined. Then there was seminary but what sort of pastoral position should I enter into. Should I start as a pastor or as an associate pastor, or just I do something else? Where should I live, back in Pittsburgh where everything was familiar or somewhere else new and a bit scary? Whom should I marry and how many kids will we have? Will I experience the same setbacks my parents experienced, and have my life turned upside-down?

It doesn't matter if we are adults or children, we need a King over us. We need God to have absolute reign in our lives, because God has the ability to gain control of us and direct us down the paths we should travel. God as our complete monarch knows everything about us, knows what we truly need and what our purpose on earth is. God is able to make it happen for us, if we are willing to give control to God. Our King will be a compassionate, holy Ruler over us, if we give ourselves over to his care and trust that God knows what is best for us.

{SLIDE 8} We do not have to fear that God as our King will steer us wrong. We don't have to fear that God will take control of us and utterly mess up our lives. God is not like some kings and queens of the

past, who used their positions for selfish gain. God is not like some rulers who like to be in control just for the sake of having power over people. God could simply have power over us and we couldn't do anything about it, because God is God and we are not. We could never stop God from taking over. But this is not how God interacts with his creation. God doesn't assume power; God requests that we give power over. God doesn't reign over us to mess things up but to perfect us, to make us whole. God is interested in giving us everything we need, whether life is difficult or easy. God is pleased to direct us through every valley and every hill, until we eventually reach our eternal home with God.

{SLIDE 9} The Israelite people rejoiced in having the Lord their God as King. The Lord had taken them from their bondage in Egypt, and set them on a path toward a land they could call their own. The Lord fed them every day, and twice on Friday, so they didn't have to work on Saturday, their Sabbath. The Lord lit the way for them to travel at night, and God created a cloud of smoke during the day.⁴ God took care of their needs, and gave them reason to celebrate the life God was given them.

God sat on the throne of their hearts, ruling not

⁴ Cf. Exodus 16 and 13:17-22.

with an iron fist but with an open hand. God gave his people decrees and statutes and commandments to follow, and through them God declared that he was a God of justice and righteousness, the God who would care for the weak and innocent when they couldn't care for themselves. Through God's word, God also declared that he was a forgiving God, One who doesn't like to see his people commit sins but One who is willing to hear their confession and accept their broken and contrite hearts.⁵

{SLIDE 10} We have cause to celebrate, just as the people of Israel once did. We have a reason to be overjoyed, just as the psalmist did in Psalm 99. We are not in complete control of ourselves, and that is a good thing. We have a King ruling over us. We have an absolute Ruler sitting on the throne of our hearts, picking up the broken pieces, mending them together, and making us whole. It may cause us to tremble a bit, because our King knows us so well. We make quake as though there is an earthquake, because there is no way to hide anything from our King. But we also tremble with joy, because our King know us so well that he knows us better than we do. Our King knows exactly what we need in this life and the next.

⁵ Cf. Psalm 99:8.

So let our King rule. Let our righteous Monarch continue to know our thoughts, feel our feelings, understand our desires, and direct our goals. Our Lord is the perfect King; nobody else will do. Nobody has the power, the glory, and majesty that our Lord has.

Assurance of Pardon

Hear this good news from Psalm 16, “The Lord is our refuge, and so we have no good apart from him. The Lord gives us counsel, instructing our hearts even in the night. The Lord will not give us up to the Grave, but will always show us the path of life. In his presence there is fullness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures forevermore.” Rejoice and believe the good news. You and I are forgiven through Christ our Savior, amen.