

“Powerful Priest Forever”

Psalm 110

Of David. A psalm.

¹The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”

²The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies.

³Your troops will be willing on your day of battle. Arrayed in holy majesty, from the womb of the dawn you will receive the dew of your youth.

⁴The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

⁵The Lord is at your right hand; he will crush kings on the day of his wrath.

⁶He will judge the nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth.

⁷He will drink from a brook beside the way; therefore he will lift up his head.

[NIV]

HOPE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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Installation of Reverend Herb Shipman

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I. Introduction

As an iron anchor plunges the waters, our spiritual anchor pierces the clouds. As an iron anchor catches fast upon a rock, our spiritual anchor lodges firmly upon Christ. Our spiritual anchor—hope—secures our perplexed soul, as an iron anchor steadies a wave-tossed ship. Great King David was no stranger to the perplexing waves of his society and his soul. Great King David needed a Rock greater than himself, or he was sunk. David cast his anchor far forward through the waves and waters of a thousand years. His anchor found the Rock.

That Rock—our Lord Jesus Christ—has ascended from the deep waters of judgment and into heaven above. Casting our anchor high through the clouds and fire, it finds the same Rock David found, and is not dislodged. Ps110 reveals the powerful position, permanent priesthood, and victorious vengeance of this Rock.

II. Powerful Position

A. *Clearly the Christ*

First, vs1-3 reveal the Powerful Position of Christ in His office as King. And regarding this powerful position, let me make three observations. Firstly, this psalm refers directly to the Messiah, Christ the Son of God. Confounding the Pharisees, Jesus Himself says King David wrote this psalm about the Christ. ^{MT22.43NIV}“He said to them, ‘How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him “Lord”? For he says, ⁴⁴“The Lord said to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.’”” Jesus simply said, “I AM that Christ.” The Apostle Peter also appealed to this psalm to prove that David prophetically proclaimed Jesus Christ. ^{Act2.34}

B. *Greater than the Greatest*

Secondly regarding His powerful position, this Lord would be far greater than the greatest Israelite King David. The LORD God himself exalts the one whom David calls “My Lord,” to be enthroned at God’s right hand. He will vanquish every enemy His judgment and rule.

The greatness of this King appears in v2: “The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your enemies.” King David ruled over Zion. But if you look at a map it is not a very large territory. Important, yes. At the center of significant trade-routes, yes. But not very large at all, compared to Assyrian, Babylonian, Alexandrian, or Roman dominions.

Now, according to v2, God would extend the mighty scepter, the strong rule, of this Lord *forth* from Zion. There are no boundaries. David was *surrounded* by enemies, but his dominion did not extend into their lands. The Lord’s dominion is different. Even throughout the lands of His enemies, His kingdom will take root and grow. God commands him: “You *will rule* in the midst of Your enemies.” This King, who always does what His Father commands, *will build* His Kingdom—His Church—right in the midst of His enemies... *everywhere*. And they won’t be able to stop Him. Not even in the farmlands of Vermont.

C. *His Own are Willing, Holy, Precious*

Thirdly regarding His powerful position, this King will not need to draft warriors. All citizens belonging to Him will most willingly volunteer to follow wherever He leads on His day of battle. To His citizen-soldiers He is the very image of majestic holiness. To them He will be irresistible. They will come and ascribe to the LORD the glory and strength due his name. ^{Ps29.2} In holy formation, they will worship the LORD. In conventicles no building can accommodate, they will gather numerously and mysteriously as the dew upon the fields. In one day as His power poured out, He added three thousand citizen-soldiers to His kingdom... and He has not yet finished adding. ^{Act2.41,47} Such is the *powerful position* of Christ the King in vs1–3.

III. Permanent Priesthood

A. Greater than the Greatest

Second, v4 reveals the *permanent priesthood* of Christ. "The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.'" Again, three things about this Priesthood. Firstly, the priesthood of Christ is greater than the great Levitical priesthood of Israel.

In the OT we don't find out much about this priest named Melchizedek. He appears seemingly out of nowhere after Abraham, vastly outnumbered, defeated Chedorlaomer and his allies. ^{Gen14.18}"Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, ¹⁹and he blessed Abram, saying, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. ²⁰And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.' Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything."

The writer to the Hebrews explains three reasons why Jesus Christ is a greater priest than all the priests of Israel. One, the Levitical priests acceded to office based upon their ancestral lineage. But God directly declared His Son a priest. ^{Heb5.5}"So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him... 'You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.'"

Two, in Israel the Levitical priests did the blessing, and received the tithes. But all the Levitical priests descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So when Melchizedek received a tithe from Abraham and blessed him, he effectively received a tithe from all the Levitical priests and blessed *them*. ^{Heb7.7}"And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater." Christ, like Melchizedek, is greater than all the Levite priests.

Three, Christ is priest of a better covenant. That is to say, this new dispensation of the Covenant of Grace unveils the fullness of that which so many things in the old dispensation merely copied and shadowed. Christ Himself is the once-for-all sacrifice. The Law is written in our minds and on our hearts rather than on stone tablets. He who Himself is the ark and the mercy seat, has within Him the entire Law, perfectly obeyed. In Him God has forgiven our wickedness and will remember our sins no more. ^{heb8} Christ is greater than the entire old covenant priesthood. All the blood of bulls and goats in all the OT sacrifices could not wash a single sin or cleanse a corner of conscience. Christ's blood covers every sin, every transgression, every iniquity from every saint for whom He died.

B. Longer than the Longest

Secondly, Christ's priesthood endures forever. The writer to the Hebrews in ch7 says of Melchizedek, ^{Heb7.3}"Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever."

Note two things about this longevity. One, the priests of the Levitical priesthood died and had to be replaced. Christ died once and rose from the dead... He never has to be—nor indeed can be—replaced. ^{Heb7.24}"Because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. ²⁵Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them."

Two, not just individual priests but the entire administration of the Levitical priesthood would end and be replaced. The Levitical priesthood started with Moses' brother Aaron, a descendent of Jacob's son Levi. But a priesthood would arise according to the timeless and mysterious order of Melchizedek rather than Aaron, and Christ would be a descendent of Judah rather than Levi. ^{Heb7.11ff} Christ is better than the entire Levitical priesthood.

C. Promise Secured by Oath

Third regarding His permanent priesthood. There is nothing in the entire universe; nothing in all eternity more sure, more absolute, more dependable than Jesus' priesthood. "The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind." Our minds are so changeable. Our decisions are so fickle. Our promises are so unfaithful. Not so with God! So this should serve as extreme comfort to you. *There can never be anything or anyone that keeps Jesus Christ from being the perfect, eternal priest—the perfect, eternal Mediator between God and man.*

Let me make one more note along that line. This perfect, eternal Priest is also the perfect, eternal, King. In OT Israel, a king could not be a priest.^{Num3.10} When King Saul tried, he lost something big: his kingdom.^{1Sa13} When King Uzziah tried, he gained something big: leprosy.^{2Ch26} But Melchizedek was both priest and king. The writer to the Hebrews observes that the name Melchizedek means 'king of righteousness'; and he is also called 'king of Salem' which means 'king of peace.'^{Heb7.2} Christ alone, as priest after the order of Melchizedek, will govern a kingdom of eternal righteousness and eternal peace. God swore it.

IV. Victorious Vengeance

A. Intimate Immanence

Powerful position, permanent priesthood, and third, victorious vengeance. V5-7 return to the Kingly office of Christ. Briefly, three things. Firstly, see the intimacy of Christ. He is *present* with His citizen-soldiers.⁵ "The Lord is at your right hand." This enabled the psalmist to say, ^{16.8} "I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken."

B. The Day the Storehouse Opens

Secondly, our great King of Righteousness and of Peace will crush all kings of unrighteousness and all kings of violence on the day of His wrath. You do not have to crush them. Indeed, insofar as it does not violate your conscience, you are to submit to the rule even of unjust and violent kings. "Vengeance is mine, says the Lord, I will repay." You can count on it.

Yes, ⁶ "He will judge the nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth." Vengeance against unjust rulers is His, yet the result is not just another dictatorship whose own violence replaces the previous regime's oppression. As Isaiah says, ^{Isa2.4} "He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore." The victorious vengeance of this Priest-King results in true and abiding peace.

C. Refreshing Confident Victory

Thirdly, as our Priest-King engages in battle against the enemy, He will not faint; He will not become weary. He will be confident; he will be refreshed.⁷ "He will drink from a brook beside the way; therefore he will lift up his head." He will not drop discouraged to his knees like the 10,000 warriors of Gideon. Rather, like the 300 few who stood upon their feet and quickly drew water with their hands before running back into the fight,^{Jdg7.3ff} our King remains refreshed and resolute in His victorious endeavor. For God His Father promised Him, ^{Ps89.21} "My hand will sustain him; surely my arm will strengthen him."

V. Doctrine

Powerful position, permanent priesthood, victorious vengeance. So bright a proclamation of our Lord Jesus Christ. But have you seen the glory? Look again! Be awed by the power and the vengeance of our Great High King. Vs1-3 and vs5-7 open to you a bright future that you may know today. They also present a dreadful terror to any who are not found in submission to this King. Would you continue in sin and rebellion against Him? Would you remain your own ruler? You may be sure that all such arrogant enmity will be the object of His infinite vengeance.

But the glory of this poetic picture is not complete until you see the Prophetic Word as it stands in this poem. You see, at the heart of His Kingly power in v1-3 and 5-7, lies His eternal Priesthood in v4. This is no mere accident; this is the deliberate poetic design of the Divine Word. The entire psalm portrays the glorious power of our great King. V4 almost seems out of place for such a psalm... except for the fact that it is smack dab in the middle, at the very heart of the psalm. This is the glory of the psalm, and this is what I pray you will remember:

At the heart of our King's power is his eternal Priesthood.

VI. Receiving

At the heart of our King's power is his eternal Priesthood. All the powerful and unstoppable endeavors of our great King have at their heart the eternal mediation of our great Priest. That is to say... *everything the Lord Jesus Christ does with all His power, He does for the glory of God and for the gracious benefit of His people.*

At the heart of our King's power is his eternal Priesthood. At the heart of Christ subduing us to Himself, ruling and defending us, restraining and conquering all His and our enemies... at the heart of all this... is His once offering up of Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God, and making continual intercession for us.^{wsc25,26} Let me give a simple implication or two.

A. Prayer through Priesthood

First is this: Your prayer access to Divine power is only through Christ's priestly mediation. This goes both ways: receipts and returns. Firstly, receipts. This Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek grants you full privileged access to the infinite divine power of the King of kings and Lord of lords. Such privileged access can *never, ever* be removed from you who trust in Jesus. The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind. He *receives* your prayers.

What do we long for from God when we offer our service—including our prayers—to Him? We long for acceptance. So often we fear that our service is shameful, unacceptable, wanting, unworthy. But the blood of Christ our Priest, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, has cleansed your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.^{Heb9.14} There is a very comforting implication: *whatever service you offer to God, Christ removes the dross and adds His perfection. And God is very, very pleased with you in His Son.* So offer away!

You may practice this in other elements of worship as well. When you reach out to put God's money into the plate, do so through Jesus the Priest... and know that God will powerfully multiply it for building His Church upon Christ the Rock. When you reach and take Christ's body and blood, do so through Jesus the Priest... and know that God will powerfully use the sacrament to purify your soul and preserve you to the end.

Don't stand for a person (including yourself) or a demon (including the devil himself) telling you God isn't interested in your measly offering. Quench that fiery dart with the shield of faith. God wants to hear every prayer anent every soul in the fields of Vermont for whom His Son poured out His blood! And God delights with every small, weak, paltry act of ministerial compassion and discipline you offer in the name of Jesus. God does big things for His Son with little offerings by His children.

Secondly, returns. Again, there is a very pleasant implication: *whatever you want God to do in accordance with His will... if you ask Him through our great Priest, He will do it with all the infinite power of our great King.* His Father, with deep delight and pleasure, commands the Son:

"What My servant Rev. Shipman asked... *Make it so...* and use *all* Your infinite and holy power to accomplish the request. It *shall* be done."

B. Power through Priesthood

Finally, let there be no question and no doubt: Jesus Christ has established His kingdom, and He *will* continue building His Church until it is complete. He acts, and who can reverse it?^{Is43.13} He will use all the power of the Majestic, Sovereign King... but His Priesthood will be at the heart of all this power. He *will build His church* in all the nations, cities, towns, and villages of the world amidst all the persecuting enemies... and He will do it by freeing souls from the condemnation of sin through His shed blood. Jesus has suffered for the sins of every soul in the farmlands of VT whom the Father promised from eternity to give to the Son as His inheritance, His bride, His body.

Do you find there are enemies of the King in the fields of Vermont? *In their very midst*, as you offer your prayer and your service to God through our great Priest, He will rule as great King.

The fears of those who can kill the body, will only arouse the pity of those who rest in Christ who in divine vengeance can cast both body and soul into eternal hell. How will your comfort come? How will your desires for completion come? Very simply by boldly imploring, "Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." All the infinite power of God will be directed to that end, because your prayers are raised to the very heart of His power: His gracious Priesthood forever. For His is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.