

“The King Who Reigns in Righteousness”

Psalm 32:1-8

by Pastor Jason Van Bommel

- ¹ Behold, a king will reign in righteousness,
and princes will rule in justice.*
- ² Each will be like a hiding place from the wind,
a shelter from the storm,
like streams of water in a dry place,
like the shade of a great rock in a weary land.*
- ³ Then the eyes of those who see will not be closed,
and the ears of those who hear will give attention.*
- ⁴ The heart of the hasty will understand and know,
and the tongue of the stammerers will hasten to speak distinctly.*
- ⁵ The fool will no more be called noble,
nor the scoundrel said to be honorable.*
- ⁶ For the fool speaks folly,
and his heart is busy with iniquity,
to practice ungodliness,
to utter error concerning the LORD,
to leave the craving of the hungry unsatisfied,
and to deprive the thirsty of drink.*
- ⁷ As for the scoundrel—his devices are evil;
he plans wicked schemes
to ruin the poor with lying words,
even when the plea of the needy is right.*
- ⁸ But he who is noble plans noble things,
and on noble things he stands.*

- Isaiah 32:1-8, ESV

Sometimes reading the Old Testament can feel like a very cruel kind of roller coaster ride. Every time a wise or faithful or promising ruler, leader, prophet, or king is raised up by God to bring light and hope to the nation, something happens to dash the hopeful expectations of God’s people again. Moses dies before being able to take God’s people into the Promised Land. After Joshua dies, the next generation forgets the Lord and goes astray after idols. David commits idolatry with Bathsheba, then his son, Absalom rebels, and then he conducts a sinful census of God’s people. Solomon allows his foreign wives to lead his heart astray from the Lord in his older age. The two best kings after David are Hezekiah and Josiah. Both of these men lead sweeping reforms of Jerusalem and Judah, but Hezekiah dies as a proud and hardened man, while Josiah foolishly rushes into battle against God’s guidance and is killed.

Throughout the Old Testament, the better kings have serious flaws, and even the best kings die, leaving God's people to slide back into unfaithful idolatry. What is needed, what is so sorely and obviously lacking, is a truly righteous king who will lead deep and lasting reforms of God's people and then won't die.

The King Who Reigns in Righteousness, v. 1

Well, Isaiah 32 brings us news of the coming of this king:

*Behold, a king will reign in righteousness,
and princes will rule in justice.*

This promised king will himself rule in righteousness, and he will have princes under him who will rule in justice. In other words, the king will have unimpeachably righteous character, and those who administer the government under his headship will be careful to carry out justice, not being corrupt or self-serving.

What's interesting to pause and consider is that in the Old Testament, the king of righteousness is actually the name of a specific individual. Melchizedek means "King of Righteousness." Who is Melchizedek? Well, we meet this man in a strange and quick scene at the end of Genesis 14. Abraham had to lead all the men in his household – 318 armed men - into battle against four kings who had defeated a coalition of five kings and, in so doing, had taken Abraham's nephew, Lot, captive as a prisoner of war. So, Abraham fights against these kings, defeats them, and brings Lot back safely from captivity. On the way back from the battle, Abraham is greeted by Melchizedek, who is the King of Salem (which many people think was Jerusalem), and who is also priest of God Most High. Abraham offers a tithe of the spoils to Melchizedek, and Melchizedek blesses Abram –

*Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Possessor of heaven and earth;
and blessed be God Most High,
who has delivered your enemies into your hand!"* – Genesis 14:19-20, ESV

That's all we see of Melchizedek until we reach Psalm 110, which is a key Messianic Psalm. Jesus Himself quoted Psalm 110:1 in explaining that the Messiah could not be the Son of David, since David in this psalm calls the Messiah his Lord:

*The LORD says to my Lord:
"Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool."
2 The LORD sends forth from Zion
your mighty scepter.
Rule in the midst of your enemies!
3 Your people will offer themselves freely*

*on the day of your power,
 in holy garments;
 from the womb of the morning,
 the dew of your youth will be yours.
⁴ The LORD has sworn
 and will not change his mind,
 “You are a priest forever
 after the order of Melchizedek.” (ESV)*

This is a Psalm of Praise to the mighty, holy, righteous Messiah, the long-awaited victorious king who is also “a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” – meaning a priest who is also King of Righteousness. Hebrews later picks up on Melchizedek in chapter 7 –

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, ² and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. ³ He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever. (ESV)

So, I think here in Isaiah 32:1, we’re promised the Messiah King, the King of Righteousness who is also the King of Peace and a priest forever, reigning forever and making intercession forever. This is King Jesus, our Great High Priest, the Righteous One who is Himself our peace.

And so, who are the princes who rule in justice? Those who belong to Christ by faith, who are grafted into His body and brought under His kingship by the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. In Revelation 5:9-10, the gathered elders of the church of Jesus Christ are shown worshiping Him around the heavenly throne, saying:

*“Worthy are you to take the scroll
 and to open its seals,
 for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
 from every tribe and language and people and nation,
 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
 and they shall reign on the earth.” – Rev. 5:9-10, ESV*

Those Who Come Under the Reign of the King, vv. 2-4

And so, verses 2-4 of Isaiah 32 describe the effect of those who come under the reign of the King of Righteousness –

- ² Each will be like a hiding place from the wind,
a shelter from the storm,
like streams of water in a dry place,
like the shade of a great rock in a weary land.*
- ³ Then the eyes of those who see will not be closed,
and the ears of those who hear will give attention.*
- ⁴ The heart of the hasty will understand and know,
and the tongue of the stammerers will hasten to speak distinctly.*
- ⁵ The fool will no more be called noble,
nor the scoundrel said to be honorable.*

At the beginning of verse 2, it's unclear whether the Hebrew translated as "each" should refer to each prince who rules in justice under the king or whether it is a reference to the king himself – "a man will be like a hiding place." I actually think the ambiguity in this reference allows us to see this both ways, that Christ is a shelter for us who belong to Him, and then that we are called to offer shelter and refreshment to others, the very same shelter and refreshment we ourselves have received from the Lord.

Jesus is our hiding place in times of trouble. When we are in distress, we run to Him and hide ourselves in Him. When we are thirsty, He gives us living water, refreshment in His Spirit. We are then called to share with others what we have received in Him – forgiveness, comfort, assurance, truth, and grace. We share what we have received, and we are doubly blessed, blessed in Christ and then blessed to be a blessing to others.

Verses 3-4 then show us the marks of those who belong to Christ – what happens to us when we come under Christ's rule – and also what Christ does through us to others. In other words, verses 3-4 help spell out what it looks like for us to find shelter and refreshment in the Lord and to extend that to others:

- ³ Then the eyes of those who see will not be closed,
and the ears of those who hear will give attention.*

Back in Isaiah 6, when God called Isaiah to his ministry, God explained that his ministry would be one of judgment –

- ⁸ And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"
Then I said, "Here I am! Send me." ⁹ And he said, "Go, and say to this people:*

*"Keep on hearing, but do not understand;
keep on seeing, but do not perceive."*

- ¹⁰ Make the heart of this people dull,
and their ears heavy,
and blind their eyes;*

*lest they see with their eyes,
and hear with their ears,
and understand with their hearts,
and turn and be healed.”*

Now, with the coming of the reign of the King of Righteousness, we see this curse from God reversed. Whereas before, they were seeing but could not perceive and they were hearing but could not understand, now their eyes will not be closed, and their ears will give attention. What does this mean? It means that we are given eyes to see spiritual things and a willing desire to hear the truth.

1 Corinthians 2:14 says, *“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”* As John Newton wrote, *“I once was lost but now I’m found, was blind but now I see.”*

Verse 4 then continues this description:

*⁴ The heart of the hasty will understand and know,
and the tongue of the stammerers will hasten to speak distinctly.*

We are caused by the Spirit to understand and know spiritual truth but also to speak it distinctly, not hesitantly and incompletely. So, what God shows us and what we are now eager to hear, we also understand and seek to share with others.

Do you know the Lord? Have you received this kind of gracious work of the Spirit in your life?

Let me put this as plainly as I can:

- Have you come to trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, the One who shelters you from the judgment of God that you deserve because of your sin and who gives you the water of life to refresh and renew your soul?
- Do you understand who Jesus is and what He has done and is doing now to save you?
- Are you trusting in Him?
- Are you eager to hear His word and to grow in your knowledge and understanding of Him?
- And, if all of this is true, are you eager to speak clearly to others about Jesus, the King who reigns in righteousness?

This is what should characterize the society of people who live under the reign of King Jesus – finding shelter and refreshment in Jesus and extending that to one another, seeing the truth that is in Jesus, listening to His voice in His word, growing on our knowledge of Him and sharing that growing knowledge with one another and with the world.

And then, finally, verse 5 transitions us from the characteristics of the followers of Jesus to the characteristics of those who resist and rebel against His reign. Verse 5 introduces us to two new characters, not the King and His princes but the fool and the scoundrel:

*The fool will no more be called noble,
nor the scoundrel said to be honorable.*

Within the kingdom of King Jesus, the fool and the scoundrel are not honored. They are not promoted. But in the world in rebellion against King Jesus, they are.

Those Who Rebel Against the King's Reign, vv. 5-7

*⁵ The fool will no more be called noble,
nor the scoundrel said to be honorable.
⁶ For the fool speaks folly,
and his heart is busy with iniquity,
to practice ungodliness,
to utter error concerning the LORD,
to leave the craving of the hungry unsatisfied,
and to deprive the thirsty of drink.
⁷ As for the scoundrel—his devices are evil;
he plans wicked schemes
to ruin the poor with lying words,
even when the plea of the needy is right.*

The fool and the scoundrel are simply descriptions of the kinds of people who reject Jesus and of how they live their lives instead. Instead of listening to the voice of God in Scripture, the fool speaks folly and instead of having a heart that understands godly wisdom and righteousness, he has a heart that is busy with iniquity.

If you're not going to speak the words of God, you are going to speak something. If you're not going to delight in Jesus in your heart, your heart will delight in something. If you don't practice godliness as a disciple of Jesus, you will practice something – ungodliness. And if you reject the truth of God's word, what you speak will be error concerning the Lord.

Nothing in the world can actually satisfy the hunger and thirst of our souls. Jesus said "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied." We'll be satisfied with the righteousness of Jesus if we're hungry for Him, but we'll be unsatisfied and remain thirsty if we try to stuff our souls with the garbage of the world. When your soul is hungry, you don't need "Me-Time," you need Jesus Time.

The scoundrel, like the fool, rejects Jesus and seeks the things of the world instead, but the scoundrel is more actively and deviously wicked. He has evil devices and wicked schemes.

He actively seeks to ruin the poor and to deprive the needy of justice. So, the fool is speaking nonsense and chasing sin trying to find satisfaction, but the scoundrel is actively plotting how he can enrich himself off the miseries of others.

This is the way the world works. The fools chase foolishness and end up getting used and abused by the scoundrels. The scoundrels are the predators, and the fools are their prey. And if you chase the things of the world thinking they will satisfy you, you're setting yourself up to be exploited by the scoundrels.

Where Are You Today?, v. 8

The final contrast to the fool and the scoundrel comes in verse 8, the noble:

*But he who is noble plans noble things,
and on noble things he stands.*

Earlier, I challenged you to consider whether you are trusting in Jesus and listening to His voice in His word and seeking to share His love with others. Well, if you truly are, then you will be the noble one of verse 8, and you will both plan noble things and stand on noble things.

What does this mean? Well, it's another way to check yourself to see if you're really one of the princes who rules in justice under the King of Righteousness or whether you are actually a fool.

Noble things are things that are honorable, generous, and helpful. They are worthy ideals and worthy causes. So, the measure of a man or woman who belongs to King Jesus is that we plan to do good, to be helpful, to be generous, to act honorably, and we stand on noble principles, honorable values, as we do so.

John Wesley put it this way: "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can."

In other words, if we name the name of Jesus and call ourselves Christians and say we serve the King of Righteousness, that should be evident in a generous spirit, helpful actions, honorable conduct all in keeping with and build on sincere and God-honoring values. We would cherish life and love and kindness and generosity. We would be actively seeking to offer shelter and refreshment to those in need.

Scoundrels see people in need and seek to exploit them. Jesus said that His disciples would see a thirsty person and offer them a cup of cold water in His name. He calls us to feed the hungry and serve the poor. That's true of those who are materially poor as well as those who are spiritually poor. We minister to both needs.

John Piper puts it this way:

1. *Christians care about all suffering, especially eternal suffering.*
2. *Christians care about all injustice, especially injustice against God.*

These are the natural outworking of a heart that loves God and loves people made in His image, of a heart that has received much undeserved love and is looking to share that love with others. If Jesus is your King of Righteousness, and you desire to be one of His princes who rules in justice, then you should love Him, thank Him, praise Him, listen to Him, speak of Him, and share His lovingkindness with others all around you.

May the Lord be pleased to make of us the kind of noble people who plan noble things and stand on noble things, for the glory of His name and the spread of the kingdom of the King who reigns in righteousness.