

The Royal Priest  
Psalm 110

Turn to Psalm 110. This psalm is a prophesy about the Messiah. There are a few other psalms like that. Jesus used Psalm 110 to teach about himself, and so did most of the NT writers. Psalm 110 lies behind more NT lines than any other psalm. Early believers often used this psalm to understand Christ.

What holds Psalm 110 together is how completely Almighty God supports the Messiah. God totally committed to make this Messiah a success. At the beginning, God says, “you sit at my right hand,” and later in the psalm God says, “I will be at your right hand.” That’s reason to trust in this Messiah: God will make sure he succeeds.

We are reading Ps 110 today because beginning next week, I plan to preach through the book Hebrews, about one chapter of Hebrews a week. And the whole book of Hebrews itself is like a long sermon on Psalm 110. Some scholars have claimed that that’s exactly what Hebrews is, a sermon on Psalm 110. This much is clear: Ps 110 is an important foundation to Hebrews.

Let’s read it:

*110:1 The Lord says to my lord: “Sit at my right hand  
until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”*

*The Lord will extend your mighty scepter from Zion, saying,  
“Rule in the midst of your enemies!”  
Your troops will be willing on your day of battle.  
Arrayed in holy splendor, your young men will come to you like dew from the morning’s womb.*

*(v4)The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind:  
“You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”*

*The Lord is at your right hand; he will crush kings on the day of his wrath.  
He will judge the nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth.  
He will drink from a brook along the way, and so he will lift his head high*

This psalm has two pillars, and they are the two central declarations of God to the Messiah. The first is in v1: *Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.* The second is v4: *The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.*

Today we will look closely at those two lines.

God's First Declaration: (v1) The LORD said to my lord, Sit at My Right Hand

This is a remarkable line. The first "Lord" in Ps 110 in Hebrew is YHWH, the name of God. Almighty God himself sets up a throne beside his throne, and places the Messiah on this second throne, and says, "You sit here while I deal with your enemies." Since when does the One True God put anyone on a throne beside him?

*I will make your enemies a footstool for your feet.* "I will turn your enemies into your furniture, into a package you can rest your feet on." It is not a good idea to be an enemy of the Christ. All opposition to our Christ is doomed. God has a schedule, a plan, it does not all happen at once. "Sit here until I do this," he says.

"Footstool" is a picture of complete although unwilling submission. Verse 3 speaks of the Messiah having willing troops on the day of battle. That's us, my brothers and sisters. We are not the footstool, we are the willing troops. Verse 6 speaks of heaping up the dead, and crushing the rulers. Those people are the footstool.

Detour on "Willing Troops." Because of controversy in the church these days, I need to say a little bit about the battle in this age, and how Christ's willing troops live. At this time, we who are the Lord's troops do not oppose the world's governments.

Jesus, in his trial, had a conversation with Pilate, the Roman Governor. Rome was a brutal and oppressive world power. It was a foreign power that had no right to be in Judea at all. If there was ever a time for our Lord to say to Rome what he thought about Rome's methods and control, that was his chance, his only chance.

What Jesus said to Pilate was this: "My kingdom is not of this world. You know that's true, Pilate, because even though I am arrested, and on trial for my life, my followers are not fighting. That's how you know that my kingdom is not of this world, and Rome has nothing to fear from me, or my followers." Jesus is our King, and our example, and we are his willing troops.

Jesus said, if they slap you on the cheek, turn the other cheek. Jesus said, if they force you to carry their load for one mile, go two miles. Paul said it this way: "if possible, as much as lies within us, let's be at peace with everyone." And soon after that, Paul speaks to us about submitting to governing authorities.

Until the Lord returns, those are the battle lines: the other cheek, the second mile, and as much as we can, peace with everyone. These Scriptures have always gone against my grain. I have a hard time even agreeing in principle to live that way. But it is where the Lord steers us. It is a different kind of battle, isn't it. Yes, and it takes a different kind of willing troops.

Until the Lord returns, these are the battle lines and the shape of the fight. For the Lord and his kingdom, it does not sound like our personal rights and freedoms are a priority, does it. The detour on willing troops is over.

Psalm 110 does not actually use the word “king” or “throne.” But it does say “sit at God’s right hand,” and there will be a footstool, and in the next line speaks of “your mighty scepter” going out from Zion, which was the royal courtyard in Jerusalem. So it’s clear that Ps 110 has in mind God putting the Messiah on a kingly throne.

Ancient kings did this with their sons. Kings usually had several wives, and sons by these different wives. When the king died, these sons would fight each other for that throne, and kill each other. There are several stories of just this in the Old Testament.

To correct this, once a king was older and had adult sons, the king would choose the son he wanted to be king after him. And the royal father would set up another throne beside his throne, and the son he chose would sit on that second throne. They would rule together. The son would become an apprentice king, he’d watch his father, and learn how to be king.

And what the son could handle on his own he would do, and people would get used to the son being their king. It made for a much more stable transition when the old king died. And while the old king lived, he knew very well others would want to be on that throne rather than his son.

You imagine, on the day that the human royal father put his son on a throne beside him, the royal father saying to his son, *You sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.* The father will watch out for opposition to the son, and sniff it out, and go after it severely. All this went on in the human world, and people knew about that.

So when Ps 110 says that’s how God Almighty will speak to the Messiah, they know exactly what’s going on. The next line says, “The LORD, God Almighty, will extend your scepter from Zion, saying, “rule in the midst of your enemies.” That’s what the royal father would say to the royal son, only now it is Yahweh speaking to the Messiah. It’s a great picture.

Christ ascended to the Father, forty days after his resurrection, and the Spirit came at Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection. Somewhere in the ten days between ascension and Pentecost, this happened to Jesus of Nazareth, with scars in his hands and his feet. The Father said, “Jesus, my Son, sit here at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”

Peter said to the crowd on the day of Pentecost, “this Jesus, whom you crucified, is now exalted to the right hand of the Father, and he has poured out the Holy Spirit, as you can see and hear.” And then Peter quotes Ps 110:1.

That’s the first declaration, “Sit at my right hand,” which makes the Messiah a Divine King, and now to the second declaration.

God's Second Declaration: (v4b) You are a Priest Forever

Psalm 110 is a prophetic psalm about the Messiah. David, the composer of Psalm 110, seems to be mulling over two OT stories. The first one is in Genesis 14, the story of Melchizedek, the priest who was the king of Salem, who met Abraham returning from a battle.

*Genesis 14:18-20 - Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine [for Abram]. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand." Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.*

Imagine David thinking about this story. "Salem" is an early form of "Jeru-Salem." Salem and Jeru-Salem are the same place, David knows that. So David is king in Jerusalem, and Melchizedek was king of the same city. And Melchizedek means "king of righteousness," which was not always true of David, though it is what David wanted.

David knows that the Messiah will be king in Jerusalem, and will be a righteous king, a Melchizedek. So Melchizedek is much like the Messiah. And the thing about this Melchizedek is that he's also a *priest*, a priest of God Most High. He's a king, and a priest.

Melchizedek brought out bread and wine. The priests kept bread and wine on a table in the Tabernacle of God's Presence. Melchizedek blessed Abram. In Numbers 6, God told the priests how to bless the Israelites. Israelites tithed to the priests, and in the same way Abram gave a tenth of everything to Melchizedek. Clearly, Melchizedek is a real priest.

(As you see, tithing has been around longer than the law of Moses. Abram tithed, and so did his grandson Jacob - Gen 28:22. Tithing is as old as faith in our God.)

So David keeps going back to this little Melchizedek story in Genesis 14, and the Spirit tells him that the Messiah will be just like this. The Messiah will be king of Jerusalem, he will be the king of righteousness, and he will also be a priest of God Most High.

The LORD has Sworn, and Will not Change his Mind (v4a)

Psalm 110:4 says, "the LORD has sworn, and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever.'" Why does this psalm say "the LORD has sworn and will not change his mind"? Turn to 1 Samuel 2. I said David was mulling over two OT stories. The first was the story of Melchizedek, and the second seems to be the story of Eli the priest. Turn to 1 Samuel 2:30.

When Joshua led the Israelites out of the wilderness and across the Jordan River and into the promised land, they eventually set up the tabernacle, their portable temple, in a place called Shiloh. And Eli was the descendant of Aaron who was the high priest in Shiloh.

Eli was a good priest, but his sons were scoundrels. They were completely corrupt, and although Eli warned them, he did not stop them. He let their priestly misbehavior continue. So God said to Eli, “I promised that the members of your family would minister before me forever. But now I am telling you something else: I certainly cannot let this continue! Those who honour me I will honour, those who despise me will be disdained.” God changed his mind.

God said, “I promised that the your family would be priests forever, but that won’t happen.” And a few verses later, God said, “I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do what is in my heart and mind. I will firmly establish his priestly house, and they will serve me forever.”

By this time young Samuel, Hannah’s boy Samuel, was growing up at Shiloh, and taking over the priest duties. And Samuel was not from Aaron’s line at all, he was from the tribe of Ephraim.

So for the next few chapters of 1 Samuel, it looks like Samuel is the faithful priest who does what God wants. It seems God chose Samuel’s priestly house to serve God forever in place of Eli’s. The trouble with this was that Samuel’s sons were no better than Eli’s sons. They were scoundrels too. They were not priests after Samuel. Samuel’s line of priests did not continue, the priesthood went back to other descendants of Aaron.

So David is thinking about all this. Melchizedek the priest, and Eli the priest forever and then God changed his mind about Eli’s line, and it seems Samuel’s line will replace Eli but that does not work out either. And the Holy Spirit says to David, “This time, God has will *not* change his mind. God Almighty has taken an oath about the Messiah priest.

When the Messiah becomes a priest like Melchizedek, that priesthood always continue. *The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: you are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.*

This is what God wants, a priest who lasts forever. Look at this through God’s eyes. God loves his people, and we his people need a priest to bring us into God’s presence. How will God’s people come before him, if there is no priest, if the priests are corrupt, like Eli’s sons? God wants a lasting priesthood, so his people can come before him.

We are pleased to have a priest that can bring sinners before God to atone for our sins so we can receive mercy. We do not think about how pleased God is to have a priest like this. We don’t think about God’s loss when Eli’s sons fail. Now his people have no way to come to him. God wants his people to have a way to come to him, and for this his people need a priest. God is delighted to have a priest who will serve hi faithfully forever.

And of course this is very good for us, for the same reason. Here is a priest whose line will never fail, who will last forever. We need a priest to bring us before God, and now we have one.

PRAYER: O God, this psalm is so good for us who trust in Jesus. It's good, because he will succeed over all his enemies. You will make sure of that. And it is good for us because he is our priest, and he will be forever. You appointed him to speak to you on our behalf. Our Lord is with you at this very moment, at your right hand, with scars in his hands and his feet. He is our priest, and we are delighted. All praise and glory to you, O God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the Lord make our love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else. May he strengthen our hearts so that we will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.