

Psalm 72:1-17

The Leading Man

Royal Robes

"Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness." This psalm pictures a great king dressed in the most splendid royal robes, the robes of justice and righteousness. Once upon a time, so the famous story goes, there lived a vain Emperor who changed clothes almost every hour and loved to show them off to his people. Two scoundrels conned influential people into believing that they could weave a cloth so light and fine that it would look invisible to all who incapable of appreciating its quality.

The two con men persuade the Emperor to take off all his clothes and put on his new resplendent robes. They hold up a mirror before him. The Emperor himself can't see these invisible clothes but he is convinced everybody must be able to see them because, in their terror, they are all raving how beautiful his new clothes are. So the Emperor looks in the mirror and states, "Yes, this is a beautiful suit and it looks very good on me."

"Your Majesty," the prime minister said, "we have a request for you. The people have found out about this extraordinary fabric and they are anxious to see you in your new suit." The Emperor is keen to parade himself in all his glory and splendour. A parade is formed. All the people gathered in the main square, pushing and shoving to get a better look. They too are terrified of incurring the emperor's displeasure. So everyone cries out loudly, "Look at the Emperor's new clothes. They're beautiful!" "How magnificent!" "What wonderful colours!" "What a marvellous fabric!" But a child was present who could only see things that his eyes saw. He cried out, "The Emperor is naked." His father scolds him. But the boy's remark, which had been heard by the bystanders, was repeated over and over again until everyone cried: "The boy is right! The Emperor is naked! It's true!" The Emperor then realized that the people were right. But he could not admit to that. He thought it better to continue the procession continuing to delude himself that anyone who couldn't see his clothes was either stupid or incompetent. And he stood stiffly on his carriage in all his pathetic nakedness.

"Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness." Any leader who is not clothed with God's justice and God's righteousness is a person who parades his shamefulness before others. Often the people of this world try to pretend that they are impressed by their leaders. But as Disraeli quipped, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." The truly powerful leaders of this world have paraded their naked shame before the people of the world. Like the Emperor of Hans Christian Andersen's story, they are more concerned about their political reputation than they are about the welfare of the people. Think about the absurd and shameful behaviour of President Clinton and his additional shameful lies under oath in court.

"Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness." How we need a leader who will lead us with justice and righteousness! *"Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness."* Our psalm opens up with the spotlight falling on God's justice and God's righteousness. What do we mean when we talk about the justice and righteousness of God? When we speak of God's righteousness what we mean is that God always acts rightly when he is dealing with people. When we speak of God's justice we mean he always treats people as they deserve to be treated.

The Right Leader for God's People

What does verse 2 say? *"He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice."* Apparently, Solomon wrote this psalm. But he's not talking about himself.

He looks ahead to the day when God will clothe another, far greater king with his justice and righteousness. He looks ahead to the day when a leader will always treat God's people rightly, always treat them as they deserve to be treated. Come Lord Jesus, come quickly.

In the Old Testament the extent to which God's people experienced God's blessing depended on the quality of their leadership: "*The mountains will bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness*" (v3). The reason God clothes this great king with justice and righteousness is so that he might bless his people. This principle applies to church life as well. If the pastor of a church is ungodly and does not treat people rightly then the whole church community suffers. If the pastor of a church treats people rightly then the whole church community prospers. Are you praying for the leaders of this church?

The great king anticipated by Solomon is the champion of those who are unable to protect themselves from evil people: "*He will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; he will crush the oppressor*" (v4).

Congressman Frank Wolf stated in the US House of Representatives: "When [Western oil companies] found oil [in Sudan] ...**the level of sophistication of the equipment that the Khartoum government is buying to kill the people has gone up.** Since August ... they have 700 million dollars of additional revenue...to buy weapons that can kill people." Western oil companies are financing the genocide of Sudanese Christians by the Muslim majority. Christians are often weak and vulnerable. Hundreds of Chinese Christians, from evangelical house church members and teachers to Roman Catholic priests and bishops, have, in the past, been placed in "reeducation through labor" camps, victims of China persecution. Many more have been arrested and have not been heard from since. Through these human rights violations, Chinese Communist government leaders declared their intent to eradicate Christianity in China, saying they would "strangle the baby in the manger." We may be safe, but our brothers and sisters in Christ in many other nations are discriminated against and sometimes physically assaulted or even slaughtered. When Jesus comes, "*He will defend the afflicted among [his] people and save the children of his needy people*" and "*he will crush those who oppress his people.*" Come Lord Jesus, come quickly.

If you have any real desire to live in a world full of righteousness and justice then to live in this world will seem to you like living through a seemingly endless drought. "*He will be like rain falling on a mown field, like showers watering the earth.*" Where we were living in Pakistan was very dry. We had very little rain. Farmers relied on irrigation water to grow crops, not on rain. At wheat harvest time the sky was yellow and the air was filled with fine yellow wheat dust. Our oldest daughter had to be hospitalised for asthma on one occasion and if we had gone back to Pakistan we would have had to go up to the mountains during the wheat harvest for this very reason. Day after day of relentless 45 degree heat. Night after night of relentless 35-40 degree heat. When rain came it was wonderful to stand outside and get absolutely saturated. That's what the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ will when he comes to establish a reign that will outlast the sun and the moon: "*He will be like rain falling on a mown field, like showers watering the earth.*" Come Lord Jesus, come quickly.

The Right Leader for the World

But Jesus is more than just the leader and protector and rescuer of God's people. He is the ruler of the entire world and one day: "*He will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth*" (v8a). The Canaanites claimed their god, El, reigned "at the well-head of the two streams, In the midst of the two deeps." Most people in the world have never even heard of the Canaanite god, El. But one day every person will know King Jesus.

Let me introduce you to John from a place called St. Cloud in Minnesota. John is a mild-mannered construction worker who stands 6 feet 3 inches tall and weighs a muscle-bound 260 pounds. He also makes periodic appearances on the streets of St. Cloud dressed as Superman. Here's what John says about himself, "I'd say my first purpose is to represent truth, justice, and the American way, which is what Superman basically stands for," he says. "And because of the terrorist attack and because of all the corruption in our society and so forth, I think that it's very important that we revitalize that image, and I think it's very important that we all unite, all Americans who love justice and truth." Truth, justice and the American way - do they really fit together? The American way is the very opposite of truth and justice. What a joke to think of America as a society characterised by justice and righteousness! Is American foreign policy characterised by an effort to establish justice and righteousness all over the world? You have only to remember what I've already said about the Sudan to know that what drives American is not a desire to see justice and righteousness planted on foreign soil but the preservation of the American way of life.

It is probably true that those who lead Australia have more integrity than the leaders of many other countries. But there are a lot of countries riddled with corruption. Even if American control of the world is desirable - and I can assure you it is not - then it is impossible to attain. There has never been a truly world empire. We marvel at the conquests of military geniuses like Alexander the Great and Napoleon, but on a world scale their empires were still small. But when Jesus comes every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord: "*The desert tribes will bow before him and his enemies will lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him; the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him gifts. All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him*" (vv9-11). Come Lord Jesus, come quickly.

Our God is not only concerned about his persecuted people. He hears the cries of all who are victimised and exploited. Sophia Khatoon is 22 years old. She is a highly skilled furniture-maker who lives in a tiny village in Bangladesh called Jobra. She works long hours, seven days a week. She looks twice her age and she lives in abject poverty. She is being exploited by a money-lender who provided the credit she needed to buy the raw material she uses to make stools and chairs out of bamboo. She is forced to sell all that she makes to this same money-lender who pays a price that barely covers her costs. It is estimated that she effectively pays interest to this money-lender at the rate of 10% per day, that is, 3000% per annum.

Now let me tell you about Permull, a 16 year old boy in India. He starts work at six o'clock every morning of the week. His job is to roll cigarettes which he calls "beedies." He says, "I roll more than 2000 beedies a day. If I fall sick for a day I will not be paid. If I go a little late to work they will beat me. If I cannot roll 2000 beedies they will beat me."

One researcher spoke to child slaves in Jordan of whom 27% admitted to having been sexually abused. Obviously, the true incidence is much higher than this. A survey conducted by the children's welfare organization *Covenant House Latin America* (known locally as Casa Alianza) reports that nearly 40 percent of street kids interviewed in Guatemala City had their first sexual experience with someone they didn't know. All 143 children interviewed have sold their bodies to survive; all suffer sexually transmitted diseases.

In 1993 a 10 year old boy, Iqbal Masih (the name "Masih" means "Christian", so he was from the Christian community) ran away from a carpet factory where he had been treated as a slave. Young as he was, Iqbal became an outspoken activist, lobbying energetically for other children to be released from servitude. In 1995 he was found brutally murdered.

Nobody has ever been charged with Iqbal's death. Who will rescue the estimated 120 million exploited and victimised child slaves of this world? Come Lord Jesus, come quickly. The shed blood of Iqbal Masih and of Constable Glen McEnally and of countless far more helpless people in this world of ours is precious in God's sight, because God cares for people, not just Christians: "*precious is their blood in his sight.*"

We need a world leader who treasures human life. Joseph Campbell asked, "What millions died that Caesar might be great?" You know what a monster Josef Stalin was, the butcher of countless millions of his own Russian people. During Stalin's reign of terror an old woman was riding a crowded bus and had to stand with her heavy packages. Finally, someone in front of her gave up a seat and so she grabbed it. "Thank God," she said. A man in the seat behind her says "Excuse me comrade, but this is an atheist society. You should say 'Thank Stalin,' not 'Thank God.'"

"Of course you are right," the old woman says. "Thank Stalin." She is silent for a moment, then says: "Comrade, I have just had a terrible thought: What shall we say when Stalin dies?"

The man behind her replies "In that case I think we can say 'Thank God.'"

Jesus is not like Caesar, not like Stalin. Human life is precious to Jesus. Come Lord Jesus, come quickly.

Solomon, the writer of this psalm, started strongly but ended disastrously. The world needs a leader who can be utterly depended upon, utterly trusted; a leader whose reputation is thoroughly deserved. Solomon expresses these desires: "*Long may he live! May gold from Sheba be given him. May people ever pray for him and bless him all day long. Let grain abound throughout the land; on the tops of the hills may it sway. Let its fruit flourish like Lebanon; let it thrive like the grass of the field. May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun.*" We will spend eternity praising Jesus, delighting in the knowledge that he will be our king for ever and ever. Come Lord Jesus, come quickly.

The Key to World Blessing

God wants the whole world to be blessed. In Psalm 72 we learn that the blessing of God's people is dependent on being ruled by the great king spoken of by Solomon, the king clothed with God's own righteousness and justice, that is, King Jesus who is God himself. So it follows that the ultimate key to world blessing is the reign of Jesus Christ. God promised Abraham he would bless all nations through him. God now fulfills that promise not merely through us, the descendants of Abraham, but more specifically, through his own Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Only when Jesus comes will all of the curse of suffering and death be removed from this unrighteous and unjust world. Come Lord Jesus, come quickly.