

Sermon follow-up

7/19/09

“Victory” – Psalm 72

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The topic of eschatology is a huge one, and the sermon could barely get the discussion started. I do not intend to fill in all the gaps here, but I will point to a few resources that will help. The church is very confused about the kingdom today, and recovering a more biblical, hopeful, historic view is vital to the growth and health of the church. This does not necessarily mean what has been called “postmillennialism” (I tend to think of myself as an optimistic amillennialist, insofar as far as I would use a label), but it does mean taking seriously the promises God has made about the growth of the kingdom, even if we do not all agree on exactly how extensive those promises should be interpreted.

Reading recommendations include:

Paradise Restored by David Chilton

Heaven Misplaced by Doug Wilson

Surprised by Hope by N. T. Wright

Israel and the New Covenant by Rod Campbell

The Victory of Christ’s Kingdom by John Jefferson Davis

Why the End Is Not Near by Duane Garner

The Puritan Hope by Iain Murray

The Next Christendom by Philip Jenkins

If we know our history, and if we take a very big picture view, it is easy enough to see that the kingdom of God is on the move and growing dynamically. The kingdom is growing both quantitatively and qualitatively, as the body gets bigger and the bride gets more beautiful. Sure, the growth of the kingdom is not a straight upward climb, but the kingdom’s long term prospects are always good.

Having a right understanding of the kingdom is incredibly practical. Very few things shape our course of action in the present as much as our view of the future. This is why stories like the one I told about Calvin are so important. The Christians who have achieved the most for the growth of the kingdom are those who believed most firmly that God had promised the kingdom’s growth. One reason the church is declining in the West and our nation’s culture is going down the tubes is that for several generations now Christians have expected defeat.

Their prophecies of doom have become self-fulfilling prophecies, justifying our own laziness, ineffectiveness, and loss of influence.

Calvin's view was (obviously) quite different. Question: Is his vision for the kingdom our vision? Do we believe in the victory of the gospel – not just at the end of history, but in history? Do we believe God's kingdom is growing? And are we willing to sacrifice for the growth of the kingdom the way Calvin and the early Reformers did?

I used Calvin's Geneva as an example of a vision of kingdom victory leading to kingdom sacrifice, but there are other examples that could be cited. For example, the 19th century Christian missionaries to Africa packed their belongings not in suitcases but in coffins, because they knew they were likely to never return. But they accepted their probable deaths as a small price to pay if they could bring the light of the gospel to a dark land. Today, the fruits of the sacrifices are obvious and the proof that they did not die in vain is easy to see. Africa is more open to the gospel than ever. There are millions of Christians in Africa and the church continues to grow at a breakneck pace there.

Another example: John Knox and the Scottish Reformers risked their necks to spread the gospel in their native land in the 16th century. The transformation of the nation from a barbaric land to a bastion of Christian civilization happened almost over night. Knox had prayed to God "Give me Scotland, lest I die!" And later he said, "It was though men [e.g., preachers] rained from the sky."

It is very interesting to notice how much the Bible says about nations. We tend to think almost exclusively in terms of individual conversion. But the missionaries of better times focused on the conversion of nations, and strategized accordingly. For example, William Carey in India labored for years before he got his first convert, but after that conversion he said, "He was only one, but a whole continent was coming after him." Given the OT use of "nations," and the language of the Great Commission in Matthew 28, this is exactly the way to view it. God is not saving a few Indians; he will save India; not just a few Chinese, but China, etc. Ultimately Jesus came to be the Savior of the world (Jn. 3:16-17) – and he will not fail in that mission!

It is also interesting to note the way Bible frames the length of history. The Bible talks about God's faithfulness to thousands of generations (e.g., Deut. 7). Even if we take a conservative estimate of 20 year generations (40 would probably be better), it has been less than 200 generations from Moses' day to ours. William

Temple, B. B. Warfield and others who have suggested we are still living in days of the early/infant church are most likely right.

Again, I ask: Do we view the growth of the kingdom in terms of nations/cultures/civilizations the way the Bible does? Do we view the growth of the kingdom over the long haul, in terms of thousands of generations? Or do we only focus on individual conversions here and there? And do we assume “the end is near”?

Consider again the Calvinian reformation. 500 years ago it looked like Christianity was breathing its last breath. At just that moment, when it seemed as though things could not get any darker, the church exploded almost overnight and the kingdom entered its greatest era of missionary expansion. It can be so today as well! But if it’s going to happen, it’s going to happen because we, the people of God, have started once again believing God’s word, believing his promises of victory, believing the words we sing.

We are summoned to participate in an empire that is taking over everything. Jesus is king and he shall reign from sea to sea! He must win the battle! And he’s going to use us to do it. Do not make the mistake of thinking only so-called important people are really important. Even the most insignificant Christian, even the smallest of churches, can make a history changing impact if we are only willing to follow Christ sacrificially.

What, then, is our part? How do we do it?

Truth Christ, obey him, worship him, sing songs to and about him, pray to him.

Prayer is so important because we cannot bring the kingdom in in our own strength. Karl Barth rightly said that “folding the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world.” Pray, “thy kingdom come.”

Tell others about him. I sometimes cite Francis on Assisi’s famous line, “Preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words.” And that’s right – talk is cheap if not joined to a life of service. But at the same time we should beware of being silent when we ought to speak, of being to shy to speak up for Christ when we really should be outspoken. Deeds are crucial, but they are not a substitute for words. Words and deeds are supposed to work together; they are fused into a single witness to and instrument of the kingdom. We must openly proclaim the gospel

of the kingdom. We must make our church an outpost and center of kingdom proclamation.

We are called to live under the lordship of King Jesus, to work more and more to make this world into a fit home for him, to more and more turn this world into his kingdom, that his kingdom might come in all its fullness. His kingdom is not of this world, but it is invading this world, and he wants us to be a part of that invasion.

Some wonder how the Bible's teaching on suffering can be squared with its promises about the growth of the kingdom. An excellent article by Jim Jordan, entitled "An Antidote to Yuppie Postmillennialism" is helpful in this regard (<http://www.biblicalhorizons.com/biblical-horizons/no-6-an-antidote-for-yuppie-postmillennialism/>):

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1. *The Blessed Hope*

"Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."

Titus 2:13

I was recently asked how I as a postmillennialist would preach on "The Blessed Hope." This is often a sticky question, because postmillennialists believe that history has a long way to go before our Lord returns to wind things up completely. How long? We don't know.

When God made the world, He commissioned humanity to keep working on it, transforming "nature" into "culture," and bringing the world from glory to glory. Man's task was and is to actualize all the potential of the world. In Jesus Christ, humanity is put back on the track, the track of making a God-glorifying world.

When we look at our home planet earth, we see that there is a tremendous lot left to do before this task is completed. If the world were largely converted tomorrow, and we could get down to work without worrying about war, famine, rapine, and the like, it would still take a long time to develop our world.

And beyond this, does the Bible anywhere say that planet earth is our only project? If God has given us the ability to travel to other planets,

perhaps they also are to be developed and glorified as part of His universal plan — all before Christ returns. This could take hundreds of thousands of years. (One reason I enjoy the marvellous science fiction stories of Cordwainer Smith, a devout Christian, is because they communicate a feel for such a universal development and glorification.) Well, whether the final return of our Lord is a hundred years in the future, or a million, we still have the question: How do we "look for the blessed hope"? What does this mean for the postmillennialist?

If I were preaching on this subject, I would preach three points. First, that the blessed hope is that Christ will come to transfigure the entire universe. Second, that the blessed hope is that Christ will come and deliver me from bondage to this life. And third, that the blessed hope is that Christ will come and dine with me this Sunday. (I realize that a few writers refer Titus 2:13 to the destruction of Jerusalem rather than to the final coming, but let me sidestep that question in this article.)

First, it is true that our Lord will return someday to transform the entire cosmos. Romans 8:18-25 deals largely with this, telling us that humanity is tied up with this world. When Adam fell, the world was estranged from him, but in the resurrection of Christ, the world begins to be reconciled to man. Someday, Jesus will return and completely transfigure this world. Just as His resurrected body was a glorified version of his natural body, so the new universe will be a glorified version of the original one.

This does not mean that Jesus has to come in my own personal lifetime in order for me to look forward to His coming. If I have a true Biblical "cosmic consciousness," then I join with Christ in wanting to see the entire universe transfigured. I know that it may be centuries or millennia before the time is right for universal harvest, but because I have a cosmic worldview, I resist the temptation to shorten God's timetable.

In Romans 8:22, Paul says that the laboring of the universe is like childbirth. The process of childbirth takes several hours, and involves many pangs of "contraction." When the pangs come, it feels like death (Gen. 3:16 + 2:17), but it is not. In times of international crisis, such as our own day, Christians think that the end of the world may be near. They are right in a sense, because the pangs do speak of the end of the old world and the birth of the new one. But the pangs are not the same as the birth. No matter how glorious the "latter day glory" of the Church may become, there will still be pangs, and Christians will still yearn and look forward to the transfiguration of the cosmos.

Second, I can indeed look for Christ to appear in my lifetime — not in the final sense, but in the sense that He will come and deliver me from the

horrors of this life. "Horrors of this life" — is that any way for an optimistic postmillennial Christian to talk? Of course it is, because it is the way the New Testament speaks. Right in Romans 8:23, Paul says that true Christians "groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our body."

True, we are already adopted in Christ, but our adoption is not complete until we are also glorified, even as He is. True, we have access to the Father's feet, lap, and throne in this life, but we don't yet have the fulness of access that we will experience once we have departed this life.

Paul said, "For me to live is Christ, but to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). Inexperienced Christians may not know what it is to yearn for death, but when you have been crucified with Christ, you begin to understand Paul's desire. Yes, if we are called to remain here to discharge our obligations, then that is a glorious calling, but to die is indeed gain! While death is indeed the last enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26), it is also true that "there is a time to give birth, and a time to die" (Ecclesiastes 3:2).

Third, our Lord Jesus Christ comes to be with us in a special way each Lord's Day. After all, what is "Lord's Day" but another way of writing "Day of the Lord," the day of visitation, of judgment, and of deliverance? The Bible teaches us that New Covenant worship is no longer afar off, as it was in the Old Covenant, but takes place in heaven itself (Hebrews 12:22-24). In Lord's Day worship we are caught up, as was John (Revelation 4:1), into heaven itself. We come to "Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant" (Hebrews 12:24).

And He comes to us. While it is true that we go to heaven, it is also true that heaven comes down to us. After all, on Pentecost the Spirit came down, bringing heaven to earth. This is also a picture of worship. We can look forward each week to a glorious appearing of our Lord and Savior. Of course, we can approach Him any time, but there is a special presence of Christ connected with public worship, because it is the time of His appointment. It is the time we draw into the Throne room to render formal obeisance before Him. It is the time when He feeds us with the very Bread of Heaven, His own precious body and blood, in the Lord's Supper.

In conclusion, it is often argued that "looking for the blessed hope" has a sanctifying effect on the Christian, and that postmillennialists remove that benefit. I hope that this article has shown that this need not, yea must not, be the case. The blessed hope is something we look forward to each week. It is also something we can look forward to when we lay down our cross

and take up our crown. And finally, it is something we look forward to at the end of history, when all will be transfigured and glorified.

2. *Personal Piety and the "Millennium"*

Postmillennialists are often regarded as "triumphalists," and there is truth to that assertion. We do believe that we "triumph" in Christ, and that He has "triumphed" over the evil principalities and powers of the Satanic age. At the same time, this truth can be emphasized in a one-sided manner, so that we lose sight of the reality of inward suffering and conviction of sin.

Indeed, in the past some Christian groups have so stressed our triumphing in Christ that they overlook the reality of personal sin.

How will it be during the "millennium"? Or, since most postmillennialists, myself included, believe that the millennium began with the ascension of Christ, how will it be during the "latter day glory of the Church," when all nations will come to Zion to receive Christ's yoke? How should we think of personal piety during those "golden years"? Will believers no longer need to wrestle with sin?

Not at all. In fact, my vision of the latter day glory is quite the reverse. I believe that the closer men draw to God, the more aware they become of their own weakness before His strength, of their own sinfulness before His holiness, of their own wretchedness before His majesty, and of their own poverty before His largesse. If the latter day glory is a time when men live nearer to God than ever before, it will be a time when men wrestle with personal sin more than ever before. It will be a time when men appreciate the *privilege* of serving Christ as never before, because they will feel more *inadequate* than ever before.

Their wrestling will seldom be with outward, gross sin, of course. The discipline of society will be such as to drive gross sin and crime into the closets, dark corners, and back alleys where it belongs. A cleansed society will not present the kinds of temptations and wicked opportunities we face today.

No, it is not outward, gross sin that men will wrestle with, but petty meannesses, lusts, and inward depravity. These things will not go away from the depths of the human heart until the resurrection of the whole man, for which all believers yearn.

I believe that Christians during the latter day glory will be less proud and vain than they are today. They will be less self-confident, and more God-dependent. They will be less sure of their motives, and more open to the corrections of the Spirit.

We see this in Paul. If ever there was a man who had a right to boast, it was St. Paul (2 Corinthians 11-12). Yet, he wrote to the believers that it

was only "when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10). Early in his career, Paul wrote that he was the "least of the apostles" (1 Corinthians 15:9). Later he wrote of himself as the "least of the saints" (Ephesians 3:8). Toward the end of his maturation in Christ, he regarded himself as the "chief of sinners," an attitude he commended to all (1 Timothy 1:15).

Paul found a contradiction in himself, one that he expresses in Romans 7:13-25. He expresses this contradiction three ways, first in terms of the law, second in terms of his personal disposition, and third in terms of his situation. (I realize that some take this passage to be speaking of Paul's conversion, but an unconverted man would not have this spiritual sensitivity. Others take this passage as a picture of the transition from the Old to the New Covenant, but while it may have some *application* in that direction, it seems to me clearly to be speaking of Paul's personal experience.)

First, Paul says that the *Law* of God is good and is spiritual (v. 14), but he finds a *contradiction* in himself (v. 15). He is able to take *comfort* in the fact that in his heart he loves the Law (v. 16), and thereby he is able to *isolate* his sinfulness (v. 17).

Second, Paul says that his inward *disposition* is to do good (v. 18), but he finds a *contradiction* in himself (v. 19). He is able to take *comfort* in the fact that he really wants to do right, and thereby he is able to *isolate* his sinfulness (v. 20).

Third, Paul says that his *situation* is such that he has passed into an estate of loving Christ and truth (v. 21), but he finds a *contradiction* in himself, for there is an inward principle of evil in him that affects his behavior (v. 22-23). He is able to take *comfort* in the fact that Christ has delivered him from his earlier estate, which he calls the "body of death," a reference not just to his physical body but also to the entire Old Covenant "body politic" situation (v. 24); and thereby he is able to *isolate* his sinfulness (v. 25).

The upshot is that Paul finds no victory in himself, even though he is saved, converted, and regenerated. He finds life only in dependence on the grace of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:1ff.) He must lean on Someone outside of himself.

In conclusion, Paul gives us an idea of the piety that Christians will have during the "millennium." Yes, the nations will obey the Law of Christ. Yes, there will be prosperity and progress. Yes, the "cultural mandate" will be fulfilled. But it will not be fulfilled by self-confident, proud, fleshly, "positive thinking," yuppie, "triumphalistic" believers. It will be fulfilled

by men and women who do not trust themselves for anything, but lean wholly on their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

3. Death and Mourning

The Bible has a great deal to say about death. It is the punishment for man's sin, and an appropriate punishment, since death destroys sin. It is the last enemy, to be defeated by our Lord Jesus when He returns to glorify His bride and her world. In this essay, however, we want to consider death and mourning.

We experience feelings of death when those we love die, and when projects in which we have invested much time collapse. The reason for this is seen in the fact that we are connected to these things. Such occasions make us mourn, and sometimes make us wish we too could die. Mourning is sympathy in death.

The reason for this is that we are connected to these things, and when they die, a part of us dies with them. Theologians sometimes call these connections "covenantal bonds." I find it helpful to think of it in terms of rays of light. Imagine strings of red (blood) light between you and your spouse and between you and your children, strings of blue (heavenly) light between you and other members of your church, strings of green (worldly) light between you and material things that you rightly cherish, and a string of pure white light between you and each of the Persons of God.

Now imagine that the white light between you and God has been cut because of sin. Since white light includes all the colors of the rainbow, all other strings of light are also cut. This is death, isolation, alienation. It is what happened to Adam and Eve in the Garden. When the bond with God was cut, so was the bond between themselves, the bond with other people, and the bond with the world. Only in Christ would those bonds be restored.

Of course, by the grace of God, all men experience the joys of covenant bonding anyway, but only provisionally. If they do not renew those bonds in Christ, they will lose them, and be isolated forever in hell.

There is yet another bond, the bond between you and yourself. That bond also can be cut. Paul experienced that death-like contradiction, and describes it for us in Romans 7:14-25. Many times we also feel at war with ourselves, and some people even become completely self-disoriented, giving off "multiple personalities," even becoming demon possessed. We rightly fear this severing of the bonds. The more we have put into someone or something, the tighter the bond becomes, and the more painful it is to have it severed. Antoine de Saint-Exupery's *Little Prince*

feared for his rose, left behind on Asteroid B-612, but he did not understand why. The fox explained that it was the time he had "wasted" on his rose that made her precious to him. And because Saint-Exupery had "wasted" time on the Little Prince, he mourned his death, though he realized that the Prince reigned on, in heaven.

Thus, the experience of death is real in this life. We work for years on a project, and it falls apart. We see loved ones die. And when these things happen, we feel death also.

On the one hand, this is a horror, for death is the last enemy. To pretend otherwise, to "think positively" and waltz on as if all were well, is a pagan, not a Biblical response. Paul said to "weep with those who weep," after all (Romans 12:15), and did not Jesus weep over the destruction of wanton Jerusalem?

Yet, death and loss can also be good for us, for they drive us back to the rockbed of our faith. They drive us to Christ. They strip away our pretenses, and reveal to us that this world is not the last.

4. Yuppie Postmillennialism

Americans are not a people accustomed to suffering. We are used to winning, to succeeding, to getting ahead. We want to be "seen at the top." We plan careers and make career moves. We think positively.

When Americans look at life and its difficulties, they see a series of problems to be solved by the application of some technique. Do you have a problem with health? Then you need drugs, or vitamins, or a new diet. Do you have a problem with your car? Then get it fixed. Is there a problem with the government? Then vote the rascals out. Don't worry about death; it can be postponed.

There is a certain truth to such an outlook, but it often is a very shallow one. How many Americans have pumped themselves up with "success seminars," only to find in a few months that it has all gone pale? We run from one "positive thinking" book or preacher or seminar to the next, in the quest for techniques that will make us feel good, and that will "solve" our "problems."

Ancient Israel in her prosperity had people who thought the same way. They had misread Solomon's book, Proverbs, and had come away believing that they could understand any problem, conquer any adversary, and resolve any difficulty if they only thought the right thoughts and did the right things.

Solomon knew better, however. Maybe he once thought that way also, but God had shown him that there was another dimension of life. So, Solomon wrote another book, Ecclesiastes. Somehow, it never became the bestseller

that Proverbs had been. It got included in Hebrew One Year Bibles, but never as a daily reading.

In Ecclesiastes Solomon said that life is not a series of problems to be solved by the mere application of technique. Rather, he said, life is often a series of unexplained horrors that have to be suffered through on sheer faith. We often don't know what is going on or why. We often see the wicked prosper and the righteous persecuted, and it does not make sense. We do what is right, and we get crucified for it.

Life goes back and forth, Solomon said. There is a time to laugh, but also a time to weep; a time to search, but also a time to give up as lost (3:4, 6).

The world is pretty meaningless. Man accomplishes nothing (1:14).

Knowledge accomplishes nothing (1:17). Pleasure accomplishes nothing (2:1). Work adds up to nothing (2:4). Possessions add up to nothing (2:7).

Wisdom gets you nowhere (2:12).

It can be said, of course, that Solomon only means that "under the sun," from the perspective of man outside of Christ, these things are meaningless. And that is true, but it does not do justice to Ecclesiastes.

Even for the believer, the world often makes no sense, and there is nothing we can do to change that. It is how God wants it.

We go through pain and suffering. We say, "Lord, show me what I need to do, and I'll change." But we get no answer. Sanctification is just not that easy.

Solomon had been the Ultimate Yuppie. He had been young. He had been urban — he worked up the biggest urban renewal project in the Bible. He had been professional. And it had worn pretty thin after a while.

In Proverbs, Solomon had said that life makes sense: You can figure it out.

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon said that life does not make sense, and you can't figure it out. Both are true. But like the Israelites and Pharisees of old, Americans really don't want to hear Ecclesiastes.

Even Job pales before Ecclesiastes, because Job got it all back doubled in the end. Solomon, in Ecclesiastes, is not so sure about that. Solomon says that in the end you get old and you can't do anything much anymore.

Then you die.

Solomon is sure, though, that God will call all things into judgment. There is another world beyond this one, a world beyond pain, sacrifice, suffering, disappointment, and death; a world where true and righteous expectations are not frustrated.

This is not that world.

As an orthodox, Bible-believing Christian who has been a postmillennialist for nearly twenty years, I think about this when I look at

the postmillennial resurgence in America today. Is it going to be a true, Biblical postmillennialism? Will it have room for Ecclesiastes? Will it have room for cross-bearing? Will it see that for us God really is incomprehensible, though not inapprehensible? Will it be clay in the Master's hand?

Or will the modern postmillennialism be Americanized? Will it be a positive thinking, victory-oriented, get rich, meet you at the top, yuppie postmillennialism?

After all, a career is not the same thing as a calling. Thinking positively is not the same thing as thinking Biblically and realistically. Getting ahead is not the same thing as getting righteous. Being seen at the top is not the same thing as being seen by the King (Luke 14:7-11).

Historic postmillennialism has always seen that God puts His people and His world through fiery trials in order to refine them and make the world a better place. Often the heart of such trials is that we are not told why they are taking place, then or later.

We are God's images, and we have a certain created "infinite depth" about ourselves that reflects His infinity. Sin and depravity warp us all the way down. Our depravity runs so deep that we are not conscious of it, and God must do things that deal with those unconscious depths of depravity. When He does, we don't understand what is going on, because we cannot. Only He can. We just have to trust Him.

If we are to have a true Christian renaissance in the United States, it will not be a superficial yuppified religion that brings it. True Christianity must have equal time for Ecclesiastes as for Proverbs in its One Year Bibles.

Years ago, when I was at Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church, I wrote a couple of articles on Psalm 78 for our newsletter's "Psalm of the Month" column. They are pasted in below.

The Psalm of the Month

Psalm 72A (72:1-8)

Psalms 72 is a glorious celebration of the Messiah's kingly dominion. Several features of this Messianic rule stand out in the first eight verses of the psalm.

First, the king acts in justice, particularly towards the poor. He does not allow oppression or tyranny to prevail. In his judgments, he reflects and enacts God's own righteousness. His kingdom is one of equity, peace, and prosperity. He does not merely hear disputes and make declarations; he acts to set the wronged ones free and crushes their wicked enemies.

Second, his reign is everlasting. Well-wishers would often shout "May the king live forever!" at a coronation. But in the case of this king, such wishes actually come true. Many of humanity's deepest cravings for stability, security, and glory, have traditionally expressed themselves in the desire for an enduring monarch. We see this in countless fairy tales and stories passed on from one generation to the next. We also see it when fallen men put their hope in false political ideologies and idolatrous civil regimes. But these are counterfeits, mere parodies of the true kingship proclaimed in the gospel. Jesus Christ, of course, is the true King, who establishes his reign for unending ages. He is the everlasting Lord and Savior.

Third, we see the universality of Messiah's kingdom. "From sea to sea shall be his sway." He will rule "from the River to the ends of the earth." In Genesis 3, Adam, the royal son of God, squandered away his dominion over the earth by rebelling against his Creator. He became a slave, subject to the forces of sin, death, and Satan. He was expelled from the Garden of Eden, forfeiting his rich inheritance in God's world. Through Jesus Christ, the Last Adam, Israel's hope for restored world-wide dominion is fulfilled. Jesus, as the new royal son of God, is now seated in the heavens at God's right hand, administering his redemptive kingdom. That kingdom is already a present reality, as the New Testament writers teach us. But it is also a growing reality. We share in the growth of his kingdom when we master sin in our own lives and begin to live as loyal subjects of the True King (Rom. 6). We also participate in the expansion of the kingdom when we speak God's truth to those who are still in sin's chains, releasing the power of the Spirit through our words (Mt. 28). Psalm 72 is a constant source of encouragement because it reminds that however often earthly kingdoms may rise and fall, or however often earthly rulers may disappoint and frustrate us, the world has a true Lord who will not mislead or abandon his people. His purposes of love and grace will steer the course of world history to its appointed end.

→ *courtesy language*

The Psalm of the Month

Psalm 72C (72:16-19)

Psalm 72 is a celebration of messianic kingship. The Psalm is attributed to Solomon, but clearly points to the Greater Solomon (Mt. 12:42), who would come and reign in perfect mercy and might and majesty.

That king, of course, is Jesus Christ. Psalm 72:16-19 teach us several important truths about his kingship and build upon the lessons discussed in this column in last month's *Analecta* on Psalm 72:1-8.

First, he provides abundant food. His kingdom is like a restored Garden of Eden. In Messiah's realm (at least symbolically, if not literally), a little grain sown on the mountaintops (usually the rockiest and most unproductive of all places!) will yield bounteous crops. The opulence of Solomon's reign (see, e.g., 1 Ki. 8:62ff; 10:14ff) could only dimly foreshadow the sumptuous banquet Jesus gives his people. We partake of this feast in anticipatory fashion each Lord's Day in the communion meal.

Second, his kingdom fulfills the Abrahamic covenant God promised to Abraham that all the nations of the earth would be blessed in him (Gen 12:3). According to verse 17, in this Messianic king, the Abrahamic covenant is finally realized: "And men shall be blessed in Him; All nations shall call Him blessed." He is not only the

Greater Solomon; he is also the Greater Abraham. He is both the Blessed One, and the One Who Blesses. When we bless (in the sense of praise) him, we share in the blessing God promised to Abraham, namely, new life through the Holy Spirit and justification through Christ's death on the cross (cf. Gal. 3-4).

Third, his kingdom is divine. Psalm 72 hints at the mysterious double identity of the Messiah. He is not only the descendant of David and Solomon, the one in whom the Davidic prophecies are fulfilled (compare 72:19 with Isa. 11:9). Verse 17 and 18, in particular, describe the coming king and his kingdom in terms that could only be true if the Messiah is not only true man, but also true God. Because he is the God-man, or more specifically, the eternal Son incarnated in human nature, he does wondrous works and his reign endures forever. Psalm 72 gives a hint of the high Christology finally made explicit in the New Testament.