

When God Reigns, His Holiness Shines

Psalm 99:1-9

Halifax: 2 November 2003

Introduction

Brothers and Sisters, today at Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church we are preparing for to organise as a particular church.

- What that means is that we will be established with our own elders to govern us where before we had elders from other churches in our Presbytery.
- When the Commission of Presbytery organises us,
 - I want you to understand that they will be acting in the name of Jesus Christ.
 - That is, they will be representing Him.
- What that means is that Jesus Christ is the One who is establishing this church in Halifax today!
 - When a King appoints and sends out servants to perform a task in His name,
 - It is not their work, but the king's work that is done.
 - The king is acting through His servants.
- Jesus makes this principle very clear when He speaks about elders binding and loosing members in Matthew 18:18.
 - He says:
 - Matt 18:18: Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.
 - The work that is done by the elders is done in heaven (where Jesus is), because it is done in His name.
 - Because His name is attached to it, it does not necessarily mean that He approves of it though!
 - The elders have a tremendous responsibility to act in accordance with what He has revealed in His word.
 - On the day of judgement, He will overrule many false actions that were taken by unfaithful representatives of His on earth.
- But He is very gracious and broad in His blessing...
 - And if we are acting according to His Word,
 - we can be assured that His blessing will attend us,
 - and that He is approving of our actions, in spite of whatever imperfections there may be in them.

- And for elders to establish churches and ordain elders to serve in those churches is something we are taught to do in God's word.
 - In Acts 13, the presbyters met at Antioch and sent out Paul and Barnabas to establish churches in the Greek cities.
 - This was what we call a provisional session.
 - They did not consider these churches to be established until they had their own elders installed,
 - and so they returned to some of the cities where they had begun mission churches to ordain elders.
 - Acts 14:23 describes this action:
 - So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

TRANS> But I have said enough about that for now.

- Today, I want to talk to you about something we ought to greatly desire in our congregation.
 - We ought to desire that Jesus would reign among us!
- On the first Sunday of every month, we have been looking at Psalms 95-100
 - Every one of these Psalms is about the reign of Jesus Christ on the earth,
 - and how we ought to worship Him accordingly!
 - These Psalms take the perspective of Jesus having already come to earth to establish His glorious Kingdom in this sinful world!
 - They rejoice in His breaking into our darkness to set up among us a kingdom of righteousness!
 - Psalm 99 is no different.
 - It begins with the words, "The LORD reigns!"

I have shown you before that when these Psalms say "the LORD reigns," or "the LORD comes to judge..."

- They are not just stating the obvious.
- They are not talking about the fact that the LORD (Jehovah) always reigns over His creation in sovereign dominion so that no atom can move apart from His decree.
 - But these Psalms speak of the reign He has in the places where people obey Him...
 - where they submit to Him as Lord and live to please Him.

- When we speak of His reign in this sense,
 - we may say that He reigns in one place and not in another...
 - we may say that He is reigning in the place where people know His will and carry it out,
 - but that He is not reigning in the place where He is not regarded and submitted to as King.
- And when I say submit to Him as King, I am not talking about perfect obedience...
 - For example,
 - A home in which He reigns is not a home where there is no disobedience...
 - It is a home where disobedience is dealt with in the way He has commanded.
 - Where there is correction and repentance and prayer and faith.
 - A home where no one answers to the King or regards His authority is a home where...
 - in the sense that these Psalms are talking about...
 - He does not reign.

This is the great bane of our fallen world...

- that we no longer submit to God and live under His divine kingship!

But the good news that is announced in Psalms 95-100...

- the good news that leads us to worship...
 - is that Jehovah has come to reign in this sinful world.
 - He has come to establish a people in God!
 - To set up a righteous kingdom among men!

Psalm 99 shows us what happens whenever Jehovah comes to reign!

- His holiness will be seen!
- This Psalm has three sections,
 - and after each one, it declares that God is holy!
 - The first section ends with v. 3:
 - He is holy!
 - The second section ends with v. 5:
 - He is holy!

- And the last section ends with v. 9:
 - For the Lord our God is holy!

- Holy, holy, holy!
 - In Isaiah 6 and in Revelation 4, the cherubim who surround God's throne say "Holy, Holy, Holy."
 - It is the only one of God's attributes that is repeated three times!
 - We do not read "merciful, merciful, merciful" or "wise, wise, wise..."
 - but "Holy, Holy, Holy!"
 - Everything about God is characterised by His holiness.
 - He has a holy law, a holy Son, a holy people, a holy judgement, a holy wisdom, a holy wrath, a holy love, a holy mercy...
 - He is Holy!

- One of the most wonderful things about holiness is that we have a hard time defining it.
 - It's supposed to be like that!
 - It speaks of God's god-ness—
 - of His excellence and perfection and beauty and sweetness and purity and power and virtue that makes Him superior to all His creatures.
 - It is that about God which makes us speechless and awe struck because we see that He is altogether excellent in every way—
 - vastly superior and more lovely than any thing else...
 - He is god-like!

- Everything that is associated with Him is called holy inasmuch as it is different from what it would be if God were not associated with it...
 - It is said to be holy because of whatever excellence it has from being associated with Him.
 - In the Old Testament, the temple was Holy because it was related to God.
 - It was not the gold that sanctified it made it special, it was the fact that it represented God.
 - And God's people are said to be Holy in so much as they are related to Him through His saving work!
 - There is that god-likeness that they are given so that they are set apart from what they were before He saved them.

And now that I have tried to give you some idea of what holiness is...

- Let me return to the main point...
- That Psalm 99 shows us that when Jehovah comes to reign among His people...
 - His holiness is revealed.

I. In the first stanza (v. 1-3), you see that the LORD's reign among His people reveals His holiness to the peoples.

A. Who are "the peoples?"

1. "The peoples" are those who are outside of God's kingdom.
 - This is talking about the effect that God reigning among His own people has on those who are not His own!
 - Verse 1 says it makes them tremble!
 - Incidentally, there is not reason to translate this verse "Let the nations tremble" and more than to translate, "The nations will tremble."
 - Either way, this is to be the effect of God's reign among His people
2. Do you see how this applies to us as a church?
 - For us, this is talking about the effect that God's reigning in us, at Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church, has on unbelievers.
 - It makes them tremble to see Him reigning among us and us submitting to Him.
 - The more He reigns, the more they will tremble!
 - That's why believers are often persecuted, especially when they are holy.
 - It makes unbelievers uneasy and disconcerted when God's reign is clearly seen in your life!
3. Even the material earth itself is said to quake when God comes to rule on His holy throne among His people.

B. You see in verse 2 that the trembling comes in part because they see that "He is great in Zion..." that is, among His people.

1. You know the accounts that are given in the Bible!
 - a. God's people were in Egypt and He came to reign when over them when He sent Moses.
 - 1) When Moses came to Pharaoh and said, "Jehovah says, let my people go..."

- Pharaoh thought, “Who does this guy think he is?”
 - And he responded accordingly,
 - “Who is the LORD that I should obey Him?”
- 2) At first, Pharaoh’s servants were able to imitate some of the miracles that God did, but when the lice came,
- they tried their best to use their tricks, but ended up going to Pharaoh and saying,
 - "This *is* the finger of God."
 - In effect they were saying,
 - “Woe Pharaoh, this is way out of our league! We are dealing the Almighty here!”
 - They disappear from the scene from this point on!
- 3) And you know how God went on to show that He was great among His people with the other plagues on Egypt—
- He brought the mightiest nation in the world at that time into total humiliation and confusion!
 - He showed that He is high above all the peoples!
 - He made them tremble before His Holy majesty!
- b. Now when Jesus returns to the earth to consummate His reign,
- there will be a day of even greater terror!
- 1) In that day, unbelievers will tremble when they see His majesty and greatness among His people!
- 2) They will want to crawl under the rocks for protection, but there will be nothing they can do...
- Jesus will come to reign and the peoples will tremble because they will see how great He is in Zion.
 - They will see how He will curse and cast out of His Kingdom all those who persisted in rebellion.
2. You can see how Jesus shows His greatness today among His people when He comes to reign over them!
- a. Look at China...
- The Communist Government has tried everything it can to get rid of Christianity and it just keeps on growing!

- God is mighty among His people—
 - The more they try to stamp it out, the more it grows!
 - They try to oppress it, and it grows.
 - They try to regulate it to water it down, but it still grows.
 - Jesus is reigning there!
- b. And look at a faithful individual Christian among unbelievers...
- People say, “This is crazy, it will never last...”
 - And then it keeps lasting.
 - They tell you how miserable you will be if you truly follow Christ, and there you are full of joyfulness that they can’t explain!
- C. But the thing that probably gets to them the most is back in verse 1 where it says that God dwells between the cherubim.
1. Dwelling or sitting between the cherubim is a picture of God sitting on His throne in the Temple...
 - In the Old Testament,
 - His throne was symbolised by the Ark of the Covenant in the inner sanctuary of the temple.
 - In this way, God gave visible testimony to His reign among them.
 - Now He has given visible testimony by sending His Son who meets us at the cross where He was crucified.
 - We come to the inner sanctuary when we come to Christ crucified to be saved!
 2. This is what makes unbelievers tremble!
 - a. It is not our morality so much as it is our testimony that we are undone apart from the shed blood of Jesus Christ!
 - That blood must be poured out before God’s throne (at the mercy-seat between the cherubim) if we are to be accepted of God!
 - They tremble because we testify that if there is no cross,
 - there is no salvation!
 - b. We confess that the sacrifice He requires is the One He provided—
 - It is not a sacrifice that we come up with to manipulate Him...
 - It is not something we can do for ourselves...

- It is what He did, and that alone that can save us!
 - It is Jesus Christ, crucified on the cross and nothing else!
- c. This is what made Able so upset!
 - 1) He wanted to bring his own sacrifice, to make his own way to God...
 - But the mercy seat testifies that your own way is not good enough.
 - God is holy, and the unbelievers tremble with both fear and rage—
 - The word tremble refers to both fear and anger—that inner turmoil and agitation you have when you go your own way.
 - 2) The cherubim are the guardians of God’s holiness!
 - They are the ones who stood with flaming swords to keep Adam and Eve out of the garden after the fall—
 - They testified to God’s holiness and said,
 - “You can not come here because God is holy and you are unholy.”
 - They are the ones who testify to Isaiah in the temple when they cover their faces and cry out “Holy, Holy, Holy,” before the LORD!
 - When Isaiah the prophet heard them, he cried out:
 - "Woe *is* me, for I am undone! Because I *am* a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts."
 - 3) If Isaiah, a very holy prophet, was struck this way,
 - It is no wonder that unbelievers are made to tremble

D. But this trembling can have a very wonderful effect on unbelievers!

- That is the subject of verse 3...
 - “Let them [that is, the peoples] praise Your great and awesome name.”
- 1. The word **praise** that is used here is a very positive word that means:
 - to confess what God is with thanksgiving!
 - This is talking about unbelievers who see God’s reign among His people and are subdued by Him!
 - By His grace they are able to see the beauty of His Holiness, and to praise His great and awesome name who sits between the Cherubim!
 - There trembling leads to praise!

2. Brothers and sisters, we need to pray that Jesus Christ will reign in our midst!
 - That He will show Himself great among us so that the peoples will see His glory!
 - Think about it!
 - This is saying that He shows His glory through His work in His people!
 - We've got to have Him working!
 - He's got to make us a praise in the earth—
 - so much more than we are now!
 - Yes, there are those that will tremble in anger and terror if God does this,
 - but there will also be those who will see His holiness and love His holiness, and come to praise Him with us!
 - Let the world see in us that He is holy!
 - If He is reigning among us, they will see!
 - The peoples will see and they will be stirred!

TRANS> That is the first thing that will happen when Jesus reigns among us.

- The second is very much related...

II. In the second stanza (v. 4-5), you see that the LORD's reign among His people makes *them* holy.

A. Verse 4 begins by referring to the strength of King Jesus.

1. He is very strong and mighty.
 - When He came to the earth, though He was in our flesh,
 - He showed us His power over the weather,
 - His power over sickness and disease,
 - His power over the Devil,
 - and even His power over death!
 - There is nothing that is impossible for Him.
 - If King Jesus wants to do something, He can.
2. But the very important question is,
 - "What does He love to do?"
 - a. One who has all this power to do whatever He wants—

- that is a fearful thing!
 - If He wants to destroy the world, He can knock it right out of existence.
- b. But we are told in verse 4 that the King's strength loves justice!
- 1) He uses all that mighty power to execute justice as a king!
 - It's not just that He feels obligated to do justice because he doesn't want to look too bad
 - or to because He doesn't want to make himself too obnoxious to his subjects.
 - King Jesus has an inbred, unconquerable love for justice!
 - It is His nature to love it.
 - 2) And because He is so strong,
 - That means that everything in the whole universe will be brought to perfect justice!
 - He will render to every one according to what is just and right.
- B. But this stanza says a lot more than that.
1. It shows that because He loves justice,
 - He actually produces it within His kingdom.
 - a. He came to establish righteousness in this fallen sinful world, and He does it!
 - b. That is what His kingdom is about!
 - It is not just that He does what is right Himself in punishing sinners and giving to each one what he or she deserves...
 2. It is that He actually takes them as disciples and teaches them to observe what is right.
 - a. When it says He **executes** justice and righteousness, the word **executes** means that He produces it.
 - You see, He produces in His disciples what He loves.
 - b. It means that He makes us into a people who love God with all our heart—
 - Who really know Him and delight in Him and want to please Him—
 - He makes us into a people who are like Himself...
 - so delighted with our Heavenly Father that we would go to the cross if that is what He wants us to do!
 - So delighted with Him that our very food becomes to do His will.

- c. It means that He makes us into a people who love one another, even as He loved us.
 - A people who are no longer in our little selfish shells, but a people who are willing to take up care for the needs of others...
 - A people who are willing to lay down our lives if it will bring good to others.
 - d. The Bible tells us concerning Jesus and His kingdom work in us that:
 - Titus 2:11-14: The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.
 - His grace is His strength and power at work for us,
 - It is a strength that loves justice.
- C. And so you see how good a thing it is that He is Holy!
1. It is good for us because it means that He reproduces His holiness in us when He takes us to be His disciples!
 - If He were not holy, He would not make us holy either.
 - But He is Holy, and so He brings us to share in His glorious excellence.
 2. And so verse 5 calls you to “exalt the LORD our God!”
 - a. You are to exalt Him first of all in your thoughts!
 - To exalt Him in your mind means to have the highest regard for Him!
 - You ought to have the highest regard and the highest delight for this one who uses His mighty power to produce justice and righteousness in His people!
 - b. And you are to exalt Him with your words!
 - 1) You are to speak of His greatness to your brothers and sisters in the church!
 - To speak of His holiness and to encourage them to put on that holiness and to seek that holiness in themselves and in the church.
 - Love is contagious—
 - When you love something that truly is excellent, you will promote it to others—you will go on about it, and soon, you will help them to love it too.

- 2) You can also speak of His excellence to unbelievers...
 - And this takes us back to the first stanza again where this psalm speaks about unbelievers beholding the excellence of Christ in the church.
 - We are to exalt Him!
 - We are to tell them of His holiness

- 3. And verse 5 calls you to come and worship Him at His footstool.
 - a. This is that same place that was called “between the cherubim” in verse 1.
 - The footstool refers to the Ark of the Covenant that was between the cherubim and that had the mercy seat.
 - It is the place where God reveals His connected-ness to us...
 - b. And brothers and sisters, God is connected to us through His Son who was crucified for us.
 - We don’t go to a temple with a mercy-seat to worship,
 - Christ is no longer set forth in that way...
 - but God has ordained the preaching of His word for us today.
 - We go to worship where the gospel is proclaimed in purity, and where the sacraments are administered in faithfulness.
 - And we prostrate ourselves at the feet of Jesus Christ who is proclaimed to us there!
 - We worship Him who makes us Holy because He loves holiness.

- I. In the third stanza (v. 6-9), you see that the LORD’s reign among His people demonstrates His holiness by the way He goes about bringing them into sweet fellowship with God.**
 - A. Jesus came to earth to set up a kingdom in which sinners could again have access to God!
 - He came in order to fulfil the promise of God through the ages that “I will be your God and you will be my people!”
 - The previous stanza showed us the effect of that relationship—
 - to make us holy—
 - but this stanza shows us how that relationship is established with a Holy God.
 - It answers the question,
 - “How can sinful men have access to God when God is so holy?”

- “How can we commune with Him before whom even the holy cherubim must cover their faces?”

B. You learn here that you have communion with the Holy God through a Mediator.

1. In this stanza,

- we are immediately pointed to those very memorable events in the life of Israel when Moses, Aaron, and Samuel interceded for God’s people.

a. Moses returned from the mountain where he had been given the Ten Commandments only to find the people given over to idolatrous worship.

1) God threatened to destroy the people and raise up another nation,

- But Moses recounts what He did at that time:

- Deut 9:18-19: "And I fell down before the LORD, as at the first, forty days and forty nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all your sin which you committed in doing wickedly in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger. For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure with which the LORD was angry with you, to destroy you. But the LORD listened to me.

- Psalm 106 tells us that God would have destroyed them if Moses had not interceded.

- Ps 106:23: Therefore He said that He would destroy them, Had not Moses His chosen one stood before Him in the breach, To turn away His wrath, lest He destroy *them*.

2) This is a beautiful example of what a priest does when he intercedes.

- You ought not to despise these Old Testament examples—

- Jesus is, of course, the only priest that is able to save us from God’s eternal punishment...

- But these examples are given to help you understand what He did for us.

- We would not be able to understand the nature of His priestly work without such examples.

b. Now consider Aaron...

- The people rebelled against Aaron and Moses and God began to kill them.

- Aaron went quickly and stood between those that had been struck dead and those that were still living with incense and stopped the plague from spreading.

- He cried to God and God answered!

- This is what our high priest Jesus does for us—

- He sees the curse of eternal death that God has pronounced against fallen man and He goes out ahead of us as if to say,
 - “Strike me first!”
 - He goes out as a shield for us to turn away God’s wrath that we might live.
 - And in this way He stops the curse so that eternal death does not reach us!
- c. Then there is Samuel
- 1) God was angry with His people and had brought the Philistines to destroy them. But listen to what happened:
 - 1Sa 7:8-9: So the children of Israel said to Samuel, "Do not cease to cry out to the LORD our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines." And Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered *it as* a whole burnt offering to the LORD. Then Samuel cried out to the LORD for Israel, and the LORD answered him.
 - 2) Those words, “the LORD answered him” are truly wonderful words...
 - They appear in our text twice!
 - At the end of verse 6, it says,
 - “They called upon the LORD and He answered them.”
 - And at the beginning of v. 8, it says,
 - “You answered them, O LORD our God.”
 - 3) They are wonderful words because they point to Jesus whom God answered when He came to turn away God’s wrath from us!
 - These wonderful words are the turning point of Psalm 22.
 - That Psalm begins speaking about Christ’s sufferings on the cross with all the agony.
 - But then it shows Him praying for deliverance...
 - And in verse 21, He triumphantly declares:
 - “You have answered Me.”
 - Jesus was there for His church!
 - He was there with our sins!
 - The rest of Psalm 22 is about Jesus gathering His church to rejoice that God has answered Him when He interceded for us!

2. Moses and Aaron and Samuel were given to us as types of Christ!
 - a. The intercession of Moses and Aaron and Samuel was only provisional...
 - And the forgiveness they secured was dependent upon the intercession of Christ that was yet to come.
 - It was only from temporal judgements that they saved the people...
 - The intercession of Christ is the only intercession that brings us into eternal communion with God...
 - It is the intercession that makes it possible for sinful people to commune with our Holy God...
 - For us to be His people and Him to be our God.
 - b. Verse 7 speaks about how God spoke to Moses and Aaron from the glory cloud...
 - But Jesus is the true word of God who comes down from heaven to communicate God's salvation to us.
 - c. And verse 7 tells how they fulfilled the priestly service to which God had called them...
 - "They kept His testimonies and the ordinance which He gave them."
 - Moses did everything according to the pattern that God had given Him...
 - But all this was only ceremonial...
 - It was Jesus who came and actually offered Himself for our sins.
 - He obeyed God's ordinance to go to the cross in order to accomplish our liberation from sin.
3. Verse 8 tells us the wonderful results of Christ, our Mediator's work!
 - a. He makes God to be "God-Who-Forgives."
 - By His priestly work, He secures this wonderful blessing for us!
 - Think of the wonderful change!
 - The word **forgive** means "to lift"—
 - and so by Christ's intercession God lifts away our sins so that they do not cleave to us.
 - He frees us from them forever so that we might enjoy eternal communion with God.
 - b. But as long as we remain in this world of sin,
 - We will still need God's chastisement when we go astray...
 - 1) So that even though He is "God-Who-Forgives,"

- He also takes vengeance on our deeds.
- 2) But brothers and sisters, this is not bad!
- This is what it means to have real communion with a holy God!
 - It means that sin always has to be dealt with!
 - It has to be forgiven, and it has to be purged away from us.
 - You can't have a relationship with our holy God and be without chastisement,
 - The Bible tells us plainly that He chastens every son that He receives, and that you are not His son if you are without chastening.
 - There are things He gives you to do that are difficult and unpleasant and that require sacrifice.
 - And there are troubles and afflictions He sends to wean you away from your flesh.
- 3) On the one hand, you must not think that because there is forgiveness, there will be no chastisement,
- On the other hand, you must not think that because there is chastisement, there is no forgiveness.
 - Do you remember what Nathan the prophet said to David confessed?
 - 2 Sam 12:13-14: So David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also *who is* born to you shall surely die."
 - You see that there was forgiveness, but there was also chastisement.
 - That is the way it is when you have communion with a holy God.
 - In the place where He reigns,
 - He always brings forgiveness, but He also brings chastisement.
 - He brings them both to us in order that we may live with Him who is holy!

Conclusion

And so the Psalm ends with a call to:

- "exalt the LORD our God, and worship at His holy hill, for the LORD our God is holy."
- What a privilege it is for us to say that this holy God is **our** God!

- That we who are sinners can come to Him and be His people when He is full of such glorious excellence—
- So brothers and sisters,
 - What do we want for our church?
 - We want Jesus to reign here!
 - We want the peoples to see the holiness of God that they might tremble and worship...
 - We want the holiness of God to be seen as King Jesus reproduces holiness in us.
 - And we want the holiness of God to be seen in the way that King Jesus establishes communion between us and God.