

The LORD Reigns So Rejoice

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Date: 15 June 2025

Preacher: Joe Tough

- [0 : 0 0] The Lord reigns, a truth we've heard echoed throughout the surrounding psalms in our series so far.! The good news that the one who rules over all is the Lord.
- He's the one who is the King of the universe, the one who reigns over all the nations. He lets kingdoms rise and He lets kingdoms fall.
- The Lord reigns, therefore rejoice. That's the overarching call of this psalm. It starts with a call to rejoice, verse 1, and it ends with a call to rejoice, verse 12.
- And I don't know about you, but I need good reason to be able to rejoice. Because you switch on the news today and you're bombarded with bad news after bad news.
- Plane crash in India leaving only one survivor. School shooting in Austria leaving ten dead. And bombs exploding in Iran and Israel.
- [1 : 1 6] All reasons for despair, not joy. So, if you came in here this evening looking to be refreshed with good news, looking for something that is worth rejoicing in, then Psalm 97 is for you.
- Because look what we find at the end of verse 1. Who's first to be told to rejoice? Let the earth rejoice. The many coastlands be glad.
- The psalmist points up to the Lord reigning and then points outward to the whole world. The whole world is to rejoice. The whole world and every nation is called or invited to rejoice in the Lord's reign.
- Now, we have two points this evening that follow the two groups of people that the psalmist addresses in this psalm. He calls to the world and he calls to God's people.
- So, point one this evening is rather simple. The Lord reigns. Let the earth rejoice.
- [2 : 3 3] In verses 2 to 7, the psalmist goes from the initial declaration that the Lord reigns to go on to paint a powerful and epic picture of the reigning Lord that the whole world is called to rejoice in.
- The psalmist's paintbrush is poetry, which he uses masterfully to paint for us an epic canvas.
- Now, I wonder if we hadn't read these verses before, what kind of imagery we might expect the psalmist to reach for as he describes the Lord?
- What Old Testament language we'd expect him to echo? Or in other words, what Old Testament colors we might expect him to use?
- Now, if you're like me, you'd expect him to reach for the nice pastel colors, some nice gentle blues or greens.
- [3 : 3 6] But in verses 2 to 5, it's like the psalmist goes straight for the permanent markers. He doesn't reach for the soft pastels, but instead he reaches for the deep blacks, the ashy grays, the burning oranges, and the vivid yellows.
- Colors that only get brought out on special occasions, and most notably seen together at Mount Sinai.

The psalmist here echoes the language used at Mount Sinai that we read from at the start of the service. There we saw the Lord on the mountain, where we were told that the people saw thunder and flashes of lightning, smoke from the fire and thick darkness.

And similar colors are used here to describe the Lord's reign. So what I want us to do is simply sit back and take it in, frame by frame.

So please, look down with me to verse 2. Clouds and thick darkness are all around him. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.

[4 : 58] Now, when we hear thick darkness and clouds, we start thinking negatively, don't we? But the psalmist thinks positively.

He links these things with righteousness and justice. And this shows us something very important. That the Lord who reigns is good.

Let me say that again. The Lord who reigns over all is good.

Clouds and thick darkness is the language used here to describe the hero, the one all creation is rooting for. The Lord reigns, and he does so in righteousness.

He always does what is best, what is fair, what is perfect. He never lets justice go undone, and he ensures righteousness and justice are upheld.

[5 : 59] Because they, they are the foundation of his throne. Verse 3. Now it takes us from the ashy grey to the burning orange.

Fire goes before him and burns up his adversaries all round. The great glory is striking language, isn't it?

It depicts for us God's total victory over his enemies. The epic picture of what it looks like when the good guy wins.

when those who oppose his righteous and just reign are consumed by fire and brought to complete end.

Now, this picture of God defeating his enemies is one we can feel uncomfortable talking about. It just doesn't seem to fit our cultural time.

[7 : 01] It's an idea that now just simply is outdated. But the picture of the good guy defeating his enemies is one we're far more accustomed to accepting than we first might think.

It's only when it's linked with God that we start having problems. Now, to illustrate this, I'm assuming everyone here has heard of the Lord of the Rings, right?

Now, to my shame, I've never actually read the books to Donald's great disappointment. But the movies, the movies were class. They're modern classics, right?

Everybody, well, most people, loved them. The storyline, the characters, they had it all. So much so, they made nearly \$3 billion at the worldwide box office.

Now, if you were to ask people who their favorite character was in the movies, then there's a good chance they'd say Aragorn, right? He was the good guy everyone loved, the righteous, just ruler that everyone couldn't wait to see rule in his rightful place.

[8 : 15] And in the worldwide movie theaters, there was no one sitting there disappointed when watching him blaze through a pack of orcs, watching him crush his enemies.

When the world watched, it cheered. You could even say it rejoiced. Why? Well, because seeing power and might being wielded in the hands of a good and righteous ruler is something we all, we all naturally accept and desire.

And in verse 3, that's what we see. The righteous, just, reigning Lord's overwhelming power in the face of his enemies.

One day, evil will finally be dealt with. God will totally crush evil. Satan's end is near.

Soon he'll be no more. As to with the heart-wrenching news headlines. Stories of grave injustices that make you sick to your stomach.

[9 : 34] One day, they'll all be gone. The good king is coming. And he's coming in judgment. And everything evil will be purged in his righteous fire. But now, for the flash of vivid yellow.

Verse 4. His lightnings light up the world. The earth sees and trembles. Now, for all our technological advancements, and for how powerful we might convince ourselves that we are, nothing will soon humble us more than seeing lightning flash in the night sky.

How many of you have seen a bolt of lightning flash in the night sky downwards towards the earth and thought, you know what?

I could take that. I could handle one of those. No. Nobody in their right mind is thinking that. Everyone's reaction is the same, and that's to flee.

[10 : 45] Flee from its sheer power. But if we think lightning is powerful, imagine the power of the one to whom lightning belongs.

Because he's so mighty and powerful that in verse 5 we are told that mountains melt like wax before him. In the presence of the good reigning Lord, Mount Everest is nothing but a candlestick that's forced to melt in the light of his majesty.

But not only do mountains melt away at his appearing, idol worshipers will also melt away in shame.

Look down with me to verse 7. All worshipers of images are put to shame, who make their boast in worthless idols.

Worship him, all you gods. Things trusted in over and above the one true God are shown to be what they are, worthless.

[12 : 03] So much so that even the psalmist calls for the idols to worship the Lord. Notice that at the end of the verse. Idols that God's people were having to live in the shadow of, but here they're taken right down to size by the psalmist.

Worship him, all you gods. I wonder what needs to be taken down to size in your worldview tonight.

What's looming large over your life tonight that you need to gain perspective on? What needs to be placed in contrast to the almighty God?

Maybe it's your boss. Maybe it's your boss. Maybe it's the government. Maybe it's your bank account. Already, we all have things that we can be tempted to look to as the things that will save us, or the things that we are to be living for, certain idols that can loom large over us that we can feel pressured into slavishly serving.

But seeing them in the light of the reigning Lord, frees us. They're shown to be dogs with a big bark, but no bite.

[13 : 26] And those who boast so loudly in them now will one day be put to shame. So, there is the canvas that is painted for us in verses 2 to 7.

Frame by frame, that's the epic picture of the Lord reigning that the whole world is called to rejoice in. It's a good picture, full of good news and good realities.

You want to see the good guy winning? Well, there it is, in all his power, goodness, and majesty. So, the question to us all this evening, is rather simple.

Can you rejoice in that picture? How do you respond to hearing that the Lord does indeed reign? that he reigns on a throne that is founded on righteousness and justice?

that he is a good king and a powerful king, who will bring a complete end to his enemies, who's so mighty that mountains melt before him, and that those who do not worship him will be put to shame?

[14 : 45] How do you respond to that? Does it fill you with joy and gladness? Or is it dread and terror?

Anyone who sits with this picture and with themselves for more than just a second has to wonder, how on earth can I rejoice knowing that there is a just God reigning when I know I've done so much wrong?

How on earth can I rejoice knowing that fire will consume his enemies when I know that includes me? And it's almost like the first half of the psalm just leaves us there.

Verses 1 to 7, and we're left scratching our heads. But as the psalm goes on, and it changes our attention away from the whole world and towards God's people, it begins to show the answer.

Which takes us on to our second point. Verses 8 to 12, and the call to God's own people. Notice the shift with me in verse 8.

[16 : 08] Zion hears and is glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoice because of your judgments, O Lord. Here we see a people who can listen to the words of verses 2 to 7, and who can rejoice, and who can be glad.

Here we see a people who are doing what the psalmist calls for. And who are those people? Well, just simply, God's people.

God's people are the ones who are able to rejoice in the news that the Lord reigns. Why?

Well, because they are a people who know that the Lord is for them. Verse 10 says, He preserves them, and He delivers them.

When you know that the one who is described in verses 2 to 7 is for you, oh, that's when you can rejoice.

[17 : 18] When you know that the one who can melt mountains is the one who is so tender towards you. So, my friends, the great question is then, how can you go from knowing that you are numbered amongst God's enemies to knowing that you are numbered amongst His people?

How can you know that He is for you? And the answer? The answer is in Christ.

In Christ, you can be numbered amongst God's people. Christ has swung the door wide open to the whole world by coming from His throne where He reigned to a cross, where He took the fire of God's wrath that you and me deserved, and He was put to shame for our sake.

He faced the terrifying reality of God coming in judgment in our place, and on the third day He rose again. And He calls.

He calls to anyone who will come to receive the free pardon that He alone can bring. And by having faith in Him, you will be counted amongst God's people.

[18 : 48] You will go from one who fears that He is against you because of your sin to the one who knows the sweet comfort that He is passionately and lovingly for you.

So my friends, whoever you are, come to Christ this evening. Don't waste any more time.

He's the gate that we all must enter through if we are to be counted amongst God's children. The doors are open. The invitation has gone out.

So come into Christ, and in Him you'll find refuge, and in Him you'll learn how you can rejoice, and you'll learn how you can be glad.

But now, it's time for us to look at the commands that go out towards all of God's people. In light of the good news that the Lord reigns, the psalmist calls for two main responses from the people of God.

[20 : 07] Firstly, he calls for God's people to hate evil. Verse 10, O you who love the Lord, hate evil.

Now, the whole idea of getting told to hate something as Christians, if we're honest, can seem out of place. But for the psalmist, it's not out of place.

For him, it's the only logical conclusion. If you love the Lord, hate evil. If you love light, hate darkness.

If you love what is good, hate what is bad. Now, this is not a call to hate people. Let's make sure we make that clear. It's a call to holiness.

to be set apart for God. Now, I know when we hear that, most of us switch off, don't we, thinking, here comes another bash over the head for my lack of holiness.

[21 : 14] But friends, I really don't think we should see it like that. Instead, I think we should see it as a war cry, as a triumphal declaration inspiring us to follow where it calls.

Oh, you who love the Lord, hate evil. It's a call to freedom. He calls us to hate evil because it's evil.

Evil is what opposes the Lord's righteous and just rule. But I believe also, we are to hate evil because the Lord has something better for us.

look at what follows straight after this call to hate evil. He preserves the lives of His saints.

He delivers them from the hand of the wicked. Light is sown for the righteous and joy for the upright in heart. Hate evil because there is light and joy for the righteous and upright in heart.

[22 : 25] We so quickly think, don't we, that God's trying to keep what's good from us. But in reality, He's calling us away from what is dangerous and harmful.

We think we're missing out. But actually, the call to hate evil is a call to life. If you hate evil, you won't see it as something desirable, but something to reject.

you'll distance yourself from it. And distancing yourself from it is like distancing yourself from razor blades. I couldn't help but ask myself the question when preparing this, have I ever asked God that He would increase my hatred for evil?

Lord, help me hate evil because it's evil and because you have something far better for me. Has that ever been the prayer for our church?

That we would be a people who hate evil? Because one of the main problems for God's people in the Old Testament was a fact that they didn't.

[23 : 40] that's what led to them being exiled in the first place. Everything the Ten Commandments spoke against, they grew to love. Now, before we start looking our noses down on them, let's just ask ourselves some questions.

Do you secretly love the idea of giving your life to something other than God? Do you secretly love even fantasize about the idea of being able to chase after whatever your heart desired?

Having a life all about money, all about fame, pleasure, I mean, you just fill in the blank. Are you unfazed when God's name is treated with disdain or when your behavior brings dishonor to your parents?

What about murder? You might hate the act, but what about in your mind? Do you love to secretly harbor malice and hateful thoughts about others?

Do you secretly love to romanticize the thoughts of committing adultery? The thought of doing it has its appeal, especially when you know who walks by. And looking lustfully?

[25 : 07] Well, that's just harmless. Just like a white lie is just a white lie, an extra 15-minute break at work is just an extra 15-minute break. I mean, no one notices anyway.

Sound familiar? These cut straight to the heart. They expose just how quickly we are to love evil instead of hating it.

So let's be a people who pray that God would increase our hatred of it, increase our hatred for what is contrary to His Word.

evil. Because a church that hates evil shouldn't be a gloomy place with morbid frowns and solemn silence, but instead it will and should be a place of light and joy.

Hating what is evil will make us more like Christ, growing in our hatred for the things He hates, also means growing in our love for the things He loves.

[26 : 22] So let's not be nervous praying this for ourselves. But not only does the psalmist call God's people to hate evil, finally, and in closing to the entire psalm, he calls God's people to rejoice and to give thanks.

Verse 12, rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous. Brothers and sisters, we have a God who calls for our joy. He wants to give us reason to be happy.

He wants to give us reason to call out for joy. And one of the greatest reasons He's given to us is the fact that He reigns. He reigns.

He's in control. So rejoice. Brothers and sisters, if I can put it like this, there is a good guy ruling over all of this.

He's mighty. He's powerful. And He's going to win. And He has one. And guess what? He's for you.

[27 : 45] The one who rules with righteousness and justice. The one who consumes His enemies with fire. The one to whom lightning belongs and the one to whom mountains melt like wax before.

is for you. The one is for you. This is the God who preserves your life. This is the one who delivers you.

Let that sink in for a moment. God, when you feel weak, when you feel insignificant, crushed by all the bad news that surrounds you and you see no reason for joy, remember who's called you to be His treasured possession.

Remember who's ultimately in control. because when you get a glimpse of that, you can rejoice and you can give thanks no matter the situation around you.

So in closing, may we be reverently emboldened to go forward in confidence, knowing more of the Lord who is for us, knowing more of the Lord who has the whole world in His hands.

[29 : 13] May we be emboldened in our witness, remembering whose side we are on. We're on the King's side. We're on the winning team.

So let's not be ashamed belonging to Him. And may we once again go from here being reminded that the Lord does indeed reign, and the Lord does indeed rule, and better yet, the Lord is indeed for us.

Let's give thanks to Him now. Let's pray in closing. Amen. Lord, thank you for the good news that you reign.

Lord, I pray for those of us who are your people here tonight, that we would have joy knowing that you reign, and joy knowing that we belong to such a God as you.

You melt mountains, but yet you are so tender towards us. Lord, make us a people who are growing in our hatred for the things you hate, and in our love for the things you love.

[30 : 34] Father, free us from the lie that makes us think a holy life is a miserable life. Father, it can be further from the truth, so please change our suspicious hearts.

And Lord, I pray for any here tonight, or even listening online, that don't yet belong to you, that do not yet see the news that you reign as something that they can rejoice in.

Father, cause them to run to Christ, I pray. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen.