

*Restoring Your Soul Through Psalms*  
***Ascribe to the LORD***  
*Psalm 29*

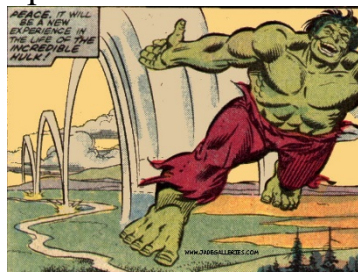
**First Presbyterian Church  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

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Sometimes, you just have to go to the source. You need an answer and you need it in writing. I started reading Marvel comics in 2nd grade.

Spiderman was the coolest; Daredevil was my favorite; I loved that Mr. Fantastic made being brainy so cool. But one character baffled me. I couldn't figure out the Hulk. When Bruce Banner turned into Hulk, he had super strength. I loved how he could jump hundreds of yards. But he was so angry!



And Hulk fought against the guys I liked:



Hulk vs. Thing is one of the best comics ever. But why would Hulk, a hero, fight other heroes? After a few years, I couldn't take it anymore. I needed to go to the source. So I wrote Stan Lee at Marvel Comics. He created these characters, surely he could answer my question: is the Hulk good or bad? Several weeks passed. Then I got a postcard back: Gerrit, the Hulk is both good and bad! Wow! That's not what I wanted to hear.

But that was so Marvel. Kid, you gotta deal with ambiguity. Like the rest of us, Hulk has both good and bad inside him. OK. I proudly pronounced this truth whenever my friends got talking about Marvel characters. Hey, the Hulk is both good and bad. Stan Lee said so! I went to the source. I got it in writing, so I could give credit where credit was due. And I could tell other people about it.

That's what's going on in Psalm 29. A great thunderstorm had moved east across the Mediterranean Sea. It made landfall in the mountainous forests of Lebanon, then headed south down the desert to Israel. Lightning flashed. Thunder boomed. Winds stripped bare the trees. The power of the storm awed people. But what causes such a storm? Is it fate? Is it the pagan god Ba-al, called the lord of thunder? No! David, looking out on the awe inspiring storm declares, "This is the LORD I AM. Our God made the world. He rules over winds and rains. He reigns over it all. Therefore, I can be at peace." The awe from the power of the

storm did not dismay God's people. It energized us. We've got it in writing. Our God rules. He is the source of all the universe. His Lordship is our peace.

This morning I'd like to take a look at this deep Biblical theme from a couple of contemporary vantage points. The first regards our stewardship. As you know, we don't talk a lot about money here. We talk about Jesus; we magnify the Triune God; we quest into his Word. And all manner of giving and mission and ministry flows naturally. But once a year, I like to take about a third of a sermon to remind us that a crucial way we acknowledge Christ's lordship is through our giving. I want to tell you about a conversation I had with myself recently. It began with a question.

*Would I feel richer if I gave away less money?* Several annual commitments to mission groups had come due. We had set up some more college funds for the new grandchildren. We sent some other people support. And of course we always make our church gift first. I felt dizzy. I mean, we just got paid and it's almost gone! What happened to the going-out-to-dinner money? And the new fall clothes allowance? But think about it, what if we just stopped giving so much away? It was a tantalizing question. I tried it on. And asked some more questions. Would we be happier? Would it *feel* like my bank account was bigger?

I thought hard about that. I tried on the possibility that I'd feel "fuller" if I had more cash staying home. For a second, it thrilled me. Man we could have some big fun! In another second, it scared me. Would I ever risk going back to *not* tithing? I recalled the weight of being responsible for finances without God. I shuddered remembering when the balance of our spending was weighted towards doing what *we* wanted to do. Burdened and worried on the outside, thin and empty on the inside. That's how I felt in those years.

Then I thought about what it means to be invested in our church. To know we're running in our lane, shoulder to shoulder with the remarkably committed believers here. If we weren't prioritizing our church in our giving, I'd feel like a pretender in front of you. Instead, I *know* this is our family of faith. We have significant skin in the game. I fill up inside thinking of all our church is and does. And suddenly I feel humbled, even thankful that we get to contribute. That's the word: we *get* to. And if we didn't, I'd feel diminished, shut out, longing to find a tangible way to declare, "We're in! We're in with you." I realized we actually, affectionately *love* to give to God through our church.

I thought about other ministries our family loves. And that's the word: *love*. We love Gardere School, the Dunham School, Caring to Love, the Magruders, and others. If we didn't give, we'd have more money. But less love. Which means less joy. Less connection to what God is doing.

I also realized that how much I value living in the flow of God's blessing love. He pours in, and in reply we try to pour out, responsibly but proportionally. If we just kept it, like a dammed up pond, we'd stagnate spiritually, emotionally and even financially. We wouldn't be as thankful, we wouldn't feel God's care as much, and I'm pretty sure even if we had more dollars for a while, we'd feel not rich but poor. That moment of seriously questioning our giving was a lesson learned for your pastor! I peered over the edge and realized, in my guts, what a joy it is to *get to give*. OK, that's your stewardship sermon for the year.

Now let's turn to how the Kingship of our God relates to the tension we feel about elections and the future of our country. There are two key pairs of implications from the fact that Jesus is ascended, reigning and returning.

### **1) You're not *in* control. The world is not *out* of control.**

There is a real, human king who reigns over the world from heaven. A man who once walked among us is on the throne, and he is not aloof from the affairs of his realm below. All other powers on earth, therefore, are merely temporary and derived. As Paul asserted, "...there is no authority except that which God has established" (Rom 13: 1). This, then, is truly an unnerving message to any who make claims of their own sovereignty, whether individuals exercising their "rights" or politicians enacting their policies. *You're not in control*. Any power you wield is held in trust for the one who reigns. Your authority is all indirect and exercised on behalf of the true king. It is temporary and provisional, held in trust for and accountable to the one Revelation calls "the ruler of the kings of earth."<sup>i</sup>

This affirmation internally freed the early Christians, many of whom were slaves. "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God" (1 Peter 2:10) and no rulers or powers or "anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8: 38-9). That personal confidence expanded to include the realization that the world is *not* out of the King's control. They understood Psalm 2 to be about their Lord Jesus. "The kings of the earth set themselves...against the LORD and his Anointed" (Ps. 2:2). But the LORD laughs at their presumption. He speaks to Christ, "You are my Son...I will make the nations your heritage" (Ps. 2: 7-8). They believed that the

Word of God through whom all things were made (Jn. 1:3) had long ago spoken to the waters of chaos, “Thus far you shall come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed” (Job 38:11). Sabers can rattle and waves can roar, bodies can be imprisoned or burned, but the ascended Jesus remains in control and will make all things new (Rev. 21: 5).

## **2) You don’t *live* here. You *love* here.**

The early Christians experienced themselves as “a chosen race” and “a people for his own possession” (I Peter 2: 9), cherished by the Lord Jesus who had made himself known to them. They were no longer from here; where the ascended Jesus dwelt was now their homeland (Phil. 3:20). This great sense of belonging to Christ also made them strangers on earth. They had to live here while pining for heaven. They had to avoid trying to settle down and be at home in a world ever bent on creating its own fulfillment through its own means. We don’t *live* here, we live in Christ, from Christ. So Peter would go on to remind them, “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul” (I Peter 2:11). The ascended Christ reminds his people that there is no life for us if we make this world an end in itself.

At the same time, we do love here. Peter also named his readers “a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (I Peter 2: 9). He recalled the ancient vocation of Israel. God’s people were called out to be different from the world in order to show the world who is the true King. So those who belong to the reigning Jesus can never again identify with this world as home, but we are ever, always sent back to this world to “proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (I Peter 2: 9). Lovingly living the difference between those who have been united to Christ the King and those still in the darkness of the world is our mission. We’re odd to the world precisely to offer a distinctive way to hope, forgiveness, peace and everlasting life in Jesus.

The Scriptures remind us that we don’t live here but we do love here. This truth can help us in the crazy of these days to know it’s *not crazy* to feel that things are not right. They’re not! And they won’t be until Christ returns and home arrives here to set all things back in order. We’re not in control, but the world is not out of Christ’s control. We’re not supposed to feel home. But we are supposed to love with the heart of our reigning King.

The witness to Jesus truly risen and bodily ascended has continued through the centuries. Every generation the miracle keeps occurring: we have a present

experience of the meaning of those events that happened once for all. The King sends his Spirit into our hearts and we are joined to him in intimate, saving relationship. The windy Spirit keeps blowing us onward in our mission to the world. And when we feel that wind from heaven on our faces, we remember that the King is returning. Things will not go on as they are forever. Right now, the Triune God has given the world quite a bit of room. For this is the season of the church, when the gospel still goes forth and people can choose whether to bow the knee freely to the King or stay in rebellion. But this is only a season. The King will return and choice will be removed. The church will be called to account for how we undertook our mission to love here without making a home here. The world will be called to account, judged, and all things will be set right. This news is a warning and a comfort, a spur and a balm. Jesus is the ruler of the kings of earth. Then, now and always.

The Lordship of Christ is our peace. We've got in writing. So we can give credit where credit is due. And tell other people about it. He is the source and he is the goal. Whichever president gets to strut his four years across the political stage, our mission remains the same. We worship the one true King. We love the people in the world for which he gave his life. In this confidence, David closed his majestic psalm:

The LORD sits enthroned over the Flood.  
The LORD sits enthroned as king forever.  
May the LORD give strength to his people.  
May the LORD bless his people with peace!

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<sup>i</sup> See Douglas Farrow, "Confessing Christ Today," in *Nicene Christianity: The Future for a New Ecumenism*, ed. Christopher Seitz (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001).