

## Understanding The Present Time

### Psalm 110

Stafford Carlson

Thank you so much for your kind and generous welcome. It's an absolute delight to be here with you again today. I am reading from the Scriptures as we find them in the Psalms. Psalm number 110, and we commence reading in the first verse.

The LORD says to my Lord:

“Sit at my right hand,  
until I make your enemies your footstool.”

<sup>2</sup> The LORD sends forth from Zion  
your mighty scepter.

Rule in the midst of your enemies!

<sup>3</sup> Your people will offer themselves freely  
on the day of your power,<sup>[a]</sup>  
in holy garments;<sup>[b]</sup>

from the womb of the morning,  
the dew of your youth will be yours.<sup>[c]</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The LORD has sworn  
and will not change his mind,

“You are a priest forever  
after the order of Melchizedek.”

<sup>5</sup> The Lord is at your right hand;  
he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.

<sup>6</sup> He will execute judgment among the nations,  
filling them with corpses;

he will shatter chiefs<sup>[d]</sup>  
over the wide earth.

<sup>7</sup> He will drink from the brook by the way;  
therefore he will lift up his head.

Amen. And may the Holy Spirit who inspired these words be pleased to bless them to all our hearts.

When Paul wrote to the Romans in Chapter 13, he called on them to live God honoring Christlike lives. And he makes that appeal in the context of explaining to them the importance of what he refers to as knowing or understanding the present time. Paul says they should wake up from their sleep. They should realize what's going on around them, and they should begin to live in a way that is in accord with the times in which they are living. So the call to holy living is made because of the urgency and the requirements of their situation. And for us today, it's so important that as God's people, we understand the context in which we are called to live for Christ. We too need to understand the present time. And in describing the present time, we in the West have had to learn a new word is the word disembedded

because in many places across the Western world, Christianity has become disembedded from our societies and our communities.

And the words of Abraham Kuyper. There's no longer a sense of inevitability about Christiana Day. It doesn't have the wind in its sails anymore. It's no longer self-evident to many people, not certainly the case in Ireland where I come from. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland has faced extraordinary pressure to turn down or to change its teaching on key matters like human sexuality and Christian discipleship. What does that mean to make a credible profession of faith? And in the wider society, the church is being pushed to the margins so that traditional moral values are no longer socially acceptable. Christians are not just old fashioned, not just out of touch. Christian values are actually dangerous we're being told -- they do harm to people. They hurt and damage people. And the trend is that churches who refuse to liberalize their moral teaching will suffer the inevitable consequences when they make their convictions public. It's not just within the Protestant churches, the Roman Catholic Church and the Republic of Ireland has had to change greatly. Two big issues have afflicted them in recent years. Many, many reports of the sexual abuse of young boys by members of the clergy. And then we have also had accounts of the treatment of young women and their babies in homes and in institutions run by the church. And the conclusion that many people in Ireland have come to is that the church cannot be trusted to safeguard Irish children. And one of the effects of that has been a huge backlash against traditional moral values, so that now the legislation on abortion or on same sex marriage in the Republic of Ireland is among the most liberal in all of Europe. Progressive policies are overwhelmingly supported by a very large number of younger voters.

But the opposition that we Christians in the West are facing cannot be compared to the suffering and persecution that our brothers and sisters in many nations of the world are facing. According to the latest reports, last year, 4998 Christians were killed, martyred because of their faith. That's 13 a day, and the vast majority of those deaths took place in Nigeria. More Christians are being killed in Nigeria than anywhere else in the world. Last year, almost 15,000 churches, our church buildings were attacked. One in seven Christians in the world are being persecuted for their faith. For the past couple of years, Westminster Seminary has been offering some training and theological education to a group of Christian leaders from Yemen. And you will know that following Jesus in Yemen is extremely dangerous. Conversion from Islam is forbidden by Islamic and by state law. Christians must keep their faith secret or risk severe repercussions from their families or from the authorities. And that can include such things as forced divorce, loss of custody of their children, interrogation, arrest and imprisonment. Pastors and church leaders are in particular danger of imprisonment and torture.

And the question is, what does this systematic and sustain persecution of Christianity in Africa and in the Middle East mean for the global church? How does the loss of Christianity, symbolic power, the erosion of its institutions, the increasing isolation of the language of faith, how does that affect us in the West? How can we make sense of these trends and the situations we are experiencing? How do we understand the present time? And the Bible gives us a very clear perspective on those questions. We need to be able to explain what's going on in our world. And the key part of that biblical perspective is found right here in Psalm 110. It's the sum of praise and worship. The psalmist expresses his confidence that the Lord reigns in face of conflict and rebellion and wars.

God is sovereign, and that means that the psalmist is confident and content. He's composed and calm. Whatever's happening around him and the context of global unrest and wars and terrorism in the

context of a marginalized and disembedded Christianity, we need the same assurance about the sovereignty and the plan of God. We need to know that the events and the trends of our world have not disrupted and they have not destroyed our trust in our gracious sovereign Lord.

So the first verse of Psalm 110 is one of the most remarkable verses in all of the Bible. It's a wonderful example of prophetic vision. The psalmist is permitted to witness a scene in heaven and to report it to people on Earth. It's as though he were transported forward by a thousand years so that he could observe and so that he could report the coronation of the Son of God.

You remember Acts 1:9 records the ascension of Jesus. He was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid them from their sight. What happened to Jesus on the other side of the cloud? What actually happened when he disappeared from view? And in answering that question, the New Testament writers rely almost entirely on this account given by David a millennium earlier. Peter explains it on the day of Pentecost by quoting Psalm 110, verse one. David tells us what it was like when Messiah first arrived back in the Heavenly Assembly after his crucifixion and resurrection-- that the Lord spoke to his son as he returned from his earthly mission on which he had sent him. In recent days Christ had heard the multitudes cry, crucify him, crucify him away with this man. We have no king but Caesar. And you remember how cruel and violent jokes had been played on him, followed by raucous, mocking laughter. They had pierced his hands and his feet and his side. His forehead and his face had run red with blood from the crown of thorns. What would the father say? How would the father respond? The father, who had filled Messiah's Cup with the bitter dregs of torment and pain and suffering. We understand that pilot and the Romans had only done to Jesus what God the Father had previously decided should happen. But what would he say now as they are reunited and Jesus enters the heavenly throne room and the seat of Heavenly Paar shakes with the anthem of the elders of the cherubim Words is the lamb to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise. But above that great thundering chorus of worship and of celebration, the risen Savior hears the words of his father. Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. From the lowest possible position as the sin bearer and the scapegoat of his people as the one who was despised and rejected by man. The one who had been bruised with divine justice. Jesus returned to the Father to be given a place of supreme dignity and sovereign honor. Christ is seated on the throne at the expressed wish, and by the personal appointment of God, the Father.

You know how some preachers and Bible teachers in the past have taught that Jesus is a figure to be pitied. They say that his purpose in coming to Earth was to be healed and installed as a king. He offered his rule to the Jews, but they rejected him. And so now Christ is in exile in heaven. He's been driven off the earth by the hatred and the rebellion of humankind. But one day in the future, he'll return to the Earth to take up that Jewish throne he had previously sought. But we have to say that such ideas of Jesus becoming King in some future era are without a warrant. Our Savior never intended that man should crown him King. Jesus had no intention of being made a king by popular selection. In fact, he sought to stifle his growing popularity. He instructed his disciples and those from the Hill not to tell anyone who he was. You remember on one occasion, after feeding the 5000, Jesus knew that they intended to make him king. And so he withdrew to a mountain to be by himself because Christ had in mind to receive a crown which no human mandate could give him. And so on the night before his betrayal, Jesus prayed. And now father glorify me in your presence with the glory which I had with you before the world began. And so it was after the crucifixion and the resurrection Jesus is taken up into the presence of the Father. There to have Yahweh place the diadem upon his head. And there he sat upon the throne, not a Jewish

seat of part in Palestine, but the very throne of God in heaven. Paul says the Philippians God exalted him to the highest place. Peter says in Acts two God has made this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. David says in Psalm 110, The Lord says to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.

Now, here's the point. It's not up to you or me or anyone else whether or not Jesus will be king. It was never a matter for human decision. God has settled the matter. He has placed on his throne the very one whom men rejected at Calvary. And, friends, that affects our preaching. It affects our evangelism. It affects our worship. It reflects our mission. We're not begging people to make Jesus king as if the matter were in doubt. Rather, we're calling on men and women and boys and girls to come to terms with the facts -- Jesus Christ is Lord. He sits on the throne. He is the king of glory. And that's why it's imperative that sinners like us bow to him as Lord and King and master. And no refusal, no resistance on our part can ever overthrow his regency. When the father invited the son to sit at his right hand, don't think that Jesus is now resting or that he is not active. He's not sitting and waiting for another hour or another day when he might rain, rather as when a judge takes his seat. The court is in session.

The work of justice proceeds -- when a king sits on his throne he does so to attend to the affairs of state. And when Christ sat down at the father's right hand, it was to manage everything in heaven and on earth, which has any relevance to humanity. He sits to direct matters on Earth so that in the gospel song, it's absolutely true He's got the whole world in his hands.

Nor should we think of Christ as being seated on a separate throne next to the fathers. It's not two thrones side by side. Rather, Eastern rulers had thrones as wide as a sofa. Honored dignitaries would be invited to sit with the ruler on the throne. And so it is the case that there is but one throne in heaven, which Christ shares with the Father sitting at his right hand in a position of glory and power and majesty and authority. Friends, this is the reality of the present time. This is the time in which we live. This is the basic truth the people must acknowledge - Jesus Christ as King and Lord. He reigns over all and we wait to see God making all His enemies footstool for his feet.

There are many practical implications of this. Let me briefly mention just to quickly, firstly, with regard to our worship. You remember how the Pharisees were constantly putting loaded questions to Jesus. They were really trying to catch him out, trying to discredit him, trying to accuse him of false teaching. And near the end of his ministry, Jesus turns the tables on them. He asked the Pharisees, What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he? And the Pharisees answered accurately, but inadequately. They said, The Son of David. And then Jesus silenced them by asking, How is it then, that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him Lord -- for the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet? If then David calls him Lord, how can he be his son? See the point Jesus was making? David the writer of Psalm 110 was one of the most venerable saints of the Old Testament era. He was the great man of faith who brought peace and prosperity to God's people. Yet when David spoke of Messiah to come, he didn't refer to him as my son or my descendant because the dignity of Christ demanded more than that, with reverence and with awe the great king of ancient Israel called Christ, my Lord.

From a human point of view, Jesus was a descendant of David, but he was also the Son of God, so that even his human ancestors bow down to worship him as Lord and as King -- the call of the Gospel, the call which we herald in mission and Evangelism, is a call for the peoples of this world to come and bow before Jesus in worship and in adoration. That means within our churches, we should never become

relaxed or flippant when we approach the Lord in worship. Different realize that a commoner doesn't address the divine majesty with presumption or with impertinence. He is the master of the universe. He's the eternal son of God seated at the right hand of God, so that when John saw the exalted Christ on Patmos, he fell at his feet as though dead. When Thomas realized that he was in the presence of the resurrected Christ, he cried, My Lord, my God.

When we catch just a glimpse of the heavenly splendor and of the sovereign might of Jesus Christ, we worship him with deep reverence and with holy awe. It's true. And it's amazing that he loves us. It's true and amazing that we're personally related to him. But we're not pals and we're not buddies. He is Lord and Master. We are servants and disciples. He is infinitely above us. His throne holds sway over us. So our worship of Christ ought to be joyful. It ought to be exuberant. It ought to be energetic. But it also must recognize that he is our King and our Lord. And all that we do in worship must bring honor and glory to the one who sits upon the throne.

Let me mention one other area. Whilst we acknowledge the present triumphant reign of Christ, it's clear that we're living in a world where the enemies of Christ are flourishing, where they are openly defiant and increasingly aggressive. Atheistic humanism is triumphant over many regions in the West. Islam holds much of the East in its grip. Many of the fastest growing countries in the world have Islamic majorities. And even in those areas where the Christian church is numerically strong, it's demonstrably shallow and superficial in its understanding of divine truth.

So the question arises where is the territory of King Jesus? Where can we find his royal realm?

That was a problem that John the Baptist had. He once asked if Jesus was the promised one or should they look for another? Even Pilate asked, Are you kidding? It was rather hard to see Christ's sphere and his authority and his rule. For that reason, some have concluded that the reign of Christ has not yet begun. It is all still future, but there is something mysterious about the reign of Christ. And verse two of Psalm 110 gives us the answer to our questions. You will rule in the midst of your enemies. I understand that Hebrew sometimes uses an imperative to express a future event so certain to happen that it can be commanded, rule dominate among your enemies. Never before has there been a kingdom like this. Rulers and kings make borders. They create frontiers. They build walls. They man frontier posts. Enemies are pushed outside the boundaries of the kingdoms. Borders are defended, borders are reinforced. But how strange -- Messiah rules and reigns in the midst of his enemies, in the place where his opponents rage against him with all their evil and malicious activity -- right there His kingdom is established, and as he rules he's gathering his people together a volunteer armor army of willing recruits who will fight in his colors, verse three says, Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power, or on the day you lead your forces in holy garments. You see, Messiah has entered the camp of the enemy, and from among the ranks of the enemy, he has recruited his own forces. They will be like the drops of dew at daybreak, full of freshness and vigor. They'll come from every nation and tribe and people and tongue. And the reason why Christ has not immediately exterminated or annihilated its enemies is because countless of them must be in ruled in the army of the Son of God. Psalmist promises that a great host will voluntarily leave the Satanic militia and will enlist in the regiments of Christ. They will come from the universities that are most skilled in arguing against the truth of Christ. They will emerge from those religions which are most opposed to the Gospel. They have come already from among the paramilitaries and the terrorists in Northern Ireland, and we believe that they will come from among the Taliban and

from the ranks of Hamas and ISIS. They will come from the north and the south and the east and the west.

A significant survey was taken in 2020 by a secular Netherlands based research group which reported that there's a far greater number of Christian believers in Iran than ever before, more than a million. And in fact, those involved in the house church movement in Iran are convinced that there are likely several million Christian believers there.

I attended a church in Northern Ireland on Easter Sunday where seven young men who had fled from Iran were baptized as Christian believers.

In May 2019, Iran's intelligence minister expressed concern over Iranian Muslims converting to Christianity. He said the intelligence ministry have dispatched agents active in countering the advocates of Christianity to areas where there is a potential for people to convert.

Christ's followers will emerge from under the sway of the mightiest satanic influences that are present in our world in order to register with the sense of God and light. The very Chief of sinners will become a Soldier of Christ. And that what happened to Saul of Tarsus filled with fanatical hatred. He headed for Damascus to persecute the Christians there. Suddenly, he has an encounter with the decent Christ and his heart and mind were transformed. He was made willing, under the power of Christ, and soon he was preaching Christ in the synagogues because in the midst of his enemies, Jesus Christ is king. He takes men and women captive by his astonishing power, and he turns them into his willing subjects.

When Paul and his friends subsequently came to Corinth, they thought they had entered Sin City. Corinth had all the corruptions of the ancient world. Corruptions associated with power and idolatry and wealth and sexual immorality. The Jewish synagogue opposed the Christian missionaries. They became very abusive. What could the apostles possibly do in the headquarters of pagans? But God spoke to Paul. Don't be afraid. Keep on speaking. I am with you. I have many people in this city, and as they witnessed and preached, they saw sinners, repent and recruited into the army of Christ. From the most unpromising of beginnings in the most unlikely environment, God builds his church. Sometimes in fear of the disemboweling of Christianity and the persecution of Christians, we make the mistake of thinking that our task is just to build an enclave for ourselves, to retreat, to form a large, well-protected, holy huddle. To remain insulated from the enemies of the gospel. That was never Christ's plan for his church. Believers are lights in the world, lights that are placed in the darkness. And that is why we seek close contact with the enemies of God's Son. So that through our witness, his power might see some of them and win them over to his cause.

But we remember Paul's words, Though we live in the world. We do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of this world. On the contrary, we have divine power to demolish strongholds. And we know that the church's weapons are spiritual weapons. Prayer and the preaching of the word. And the part of the indwelling spirit. And using such power, we made the modest strongholds. Refusing such power, we will know no success. And the task of theological education is to enable and equip the church to use those weapons effectively.

That's why our work and the global ministry department at Westminster, we believe, is so important and so strategic that in those areas of the world where the gospel is opposed most fiercely and most aggressively, we are seeking to support and strengthen the Reformed Church could only thing be more

strategic , could anything be more important than supporting the church in China, the church in the Middle East, as well as Southeast Asia and Latin America?

Currently, we're living behind enemy lines. We are in the midst of Christ's enemies, we're certainly not disoriented because we understand the present time. We realize the environment into which we have been called to minister and preach and witness and live. And we're not unaware of the plan and the program that is in place. Jesus Christ is king. He is reigning and he will continue to reign until all his enemies become a footstool for his feet. The day will surely come when we will see Christ emerge clearly and plainly as the only ruler of this universe. There will come a day, dear friends, when the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. And He will reign for ever and ever. It will then be apparent that all his enemies have become a footstool for his feet. Let's pray.

Gracious Lord, we lift our hearts to you in worship and in adoration, in praise for our great king and sovereign Jesus Christ, the one who reigns above and the one who will ultimately bring all things to subjection under his feet. Dear Lord, give us this hope. Give us this confidence. Make us to be energetic in our prayers and in our evangelism and in our mission so that we will see the territory of Christ established and his name exalted in all Earth. We look forward to that day when the knowledge of the glory of God will cover the Earth, even as the waters cover the sea. Until that day, keep us faithful, keep us true, keep us loyal to our great Savior Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.