

Youth Teaching Resources

January 6, 2019



Epiphany (January 6-March 3)

What Are We Praying For?

Psalm 72 (RCL 1-7, 10-14) – “A Prayer for Justice”

Psalm 29 – “A Prayer for Peace”

Psalm 36 (RCL 5-10) – “A Prayer for Love”

Psalm 19 – “A Prayer for Goodness”

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A Prayer for Justice

Psalms 72 (RCL 1-7, 10-14)

YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Jeremy Colliver

This youth teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

PARENT PREP

“I don’t need you.” How many times have parents, or people who work with youth, heard this phrase, or a phrase very similar? Students want to do it themselves; they want to be the ruler of their own dominion. This tune usually changes when they are in trouble and have tried every other way they know themselves to fix the issue. You’re never going to be able to force your student to be the first person they turn to when they need help. What you can do is be present and offer honest opinions on how they can get to where they need to be? There aren’t many people that look out for your student first and your student will figure this out.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Fellowship

Begin your session by showing the clip “Beowulf Shall Be King” from *Beowulf*. If you are unable to show the clip, describe the clip to the best of your abilities and then facilitate a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) How is the king chosen?
- 2) Why does he believe Beowulf should be made king?
- 3) How do other people respond to Beowulf being named king?
- 4) What is Beowulf’s reaction to being named king?
- 5) What attributes do we look for in those who govern?

Information

Transition to the next section of the session by reading Psalm 72. Allow the students to ask any initial questions they have about the text. As you answer their questions, you may want to provide some of the information found in Tony's commentary to answer their questions. When the students have had an opportunity to share their initial thoughts, continue the discussion by facilitating a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) What attributes does the psalmist desire in a king for the Israelites?
- 2) What do justice and righteousness mean? How do they relate to each other? How do they relate to how the Israelites were to live out their life?
- 3) How was Israel different in how they were to treat the poor?
- 4) Why would the psalmist pray for a long tenure for the king?
- 5) How do you think the writer of the psalm would have reacted to Jesus?

If your group would like to dig deeper in their discussion, share some of the insights that Tony provides in the "Digging Deeper" portion of his commentary. You may want to use some questions like the following to facilitate your discussion:

- 1) What was this psalm written for?
- 2) How is Jesus the ideal king of Psalm 72?
- 3) What qualities should we look for in our leaders?

You may also want your group to discuss "The Hardest Question" if they would like to continue their discussion on this passage. Tony poses the following question to consider as "The Hardest Question": Why so many psalms about kings?

Transformation

Conclude your session by distributing poster board and markers and challenge the students to create campaign posters for themselves. Allow time for students to think of the attributes and gifts they have that would make them good at being in charge as they make their posters. When the students have created their posters, choose several students to share their campaign posters with the larger group and then facilitate a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) What attributes were most common amongst the presenters?
- 2) What other attributes would you like to see in people who are responsible for you?
- 3) How would your view of authority change, if at all, if you were not able to choose who governed you?
- 4) What attributes of faith would you want in your leaders?
- 5) How can you effect change even if you aren't in charge?

Close with a prayer asking God to remind our leaders to be aware and advocate for all people.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

The text—The Revised Common Lectionary uses only vv. 1-7 and 10-14 for the liturgical readings. For Bible study, it works better to consider the entire psalm.

A king’s son—The superscription of Psalm 72 reflects a tradition that this psalm was written for Solomon’s coronation, but the psalm itself is written so it could be used for any coronation. The psalmist prays that God will inspire divine righteousness in “a king’s son” – more literally, “a son of a king.” Solomon, of course, was King David’s son, beginning a dynasty of Davidic scions that lasted throughout Judah’s history.

The king as judge—The role of a good king as judge is illustrated by several biblical stories. The classic example is the story of two prostitutes who brought their case to King Solomon after one of them accidentally smothered her baby while sleeping, and claimed that the other woman’s child was her own. Solomon famously declared that the living child should be sliced in half and divided between them, revealing the true mother when she cried out against the idea (1 Kings 3:16-28).

Another story relates Joab’s ploy to get David to allow Absalom to return home by arranging for a skilled actress to play the part of a bereaved mother seeking protection for her living son, who had killed his brother (2 Samuel 14). The devious Absalom later stirred up sentiment against his father by claiming that David’s administration offered no recourse for justice (2 Sam. 15:1-7).

Jesus’s mission—Jesus began his ministry by declaring his interest in bringing justice to the poor. In Nazareth’s synagogue, he quoted from Isaiah 61:1, declaring that he had come to bring good news to the poor and to set free the downtrodden (Luke 4:18-19). How does Jesus model the ideal king as described in Ps. 72:1-4? How does the challenge of Matt. 25:40 extend this calling to every child of the King?

Same old, same old—Can you think of any political leaders who have shown a special interest in helping the poor? It’s no secret that political systems tend to be dominated by those who have the most money, promoting policies that favor the wealthy rather than using resources to lift up the poor.

Would the psalmist think of America’s current leadership as an answer to prayer?

Digging Deeper *continued*

A fitting doxology—The last two verses of Psalm 72 may have been added as a conclusion, not only for the psalm, but to serve as an appropriate benediction marking the end of “Book II” of Psalms (42-72). This section is often called the “Elohistic Psalter” because God is frequently (though not exclusively) called “Elohim” in these chapters. “Book II” may have originally circulated as an independent collection, later integrated into the main body of the psalms. Just as Psalm 150 serves as a benediction for the entire compilation, so these two verses bring the Elohistic Psalter to a fitting close. And, they are not entirely unrelated to the psalm in which they appear. They declare that Yahweh alone is Israel’s true king, the only one whose glory can fill the earth and outlive the sun.

Praying, and voting—People who live under a ruling monarchy have no input into who their next king will be. Americans have never had any liking for a king, but we do have leaders who exercise the same kind of power. While the psalmist could only pray for a just ruler, we have the opportunity to vote for leaders who are concerned with justice for all.

What qualities should we look for in our leaders as we not only pray for them, but vote?

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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Why so many psalms about kings?

Given the image of Christ as king, it is not surprising that the psalm text for Epiphany this year is from one of the “Royal Psalms,” and is designed as a prayer for a just king.

At least eleven psalms may be classified as Royal Psalms, and all of them relate to the rule of David and his dynasty in Jerusalem (2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, 144). Psalm 72 was probably composed for us in coronation festivities when a new king ascended the throne. An old tradition, reflected in the superscription, suggests that the king was Solomon, perhaps because of the psalm’s emphasis on wise justice. Some traditions even hold that the prayer was written by David for Solomon.

But why do we have so many psalms about kings? The northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians around 722 BCE, and there were no more kings. The southern kingdom of Judah was defeated by the Babylonians in 587 BCE, bringing kingship to an end in Jerusalem. After the exile, Hebrews were allowed to return to Jerusalem, but ruled by a Persian-appointed governor, not a king.

Still, psalms about kingship and prayers for a just king remained popular long after Israel and Judah had a king, or any hope for one in the near future. Indeed, the Royal Psalms not only persist, but some of them occupy strategic places in the psalter. The second psalm in the collection, following the introductory wisdom psalm, celebrates the king’s enthronement. Psalm 72 concludes “Book 2” of the five collections making up the psalms with a prayer for a king who embodied justice. Similarly, Psalm 89 – a royal psalm that laments the loss of the monarchy – closes “Book 3” (the five divisions are 1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, and 107-150). The last of the royal psalms, Psalm 144, seems to transfer the responsibilities of the king to the people as a whole.

Thus, while the Royal Psalms recall Israel’s kings with fondness, the kings were representatives of the people, and all were called to bring God’s will to bear on earth through lives characterized by justice, righteousness, and the state of peace and prosperity embodied in the word *shalom*.

These qualities, of course, are at the heart of Psalm 72, which recognizes that true justice, righteousness, and peaceful prosperity can only occur when the poor are empowered and included as equal citizens. The prophets consistently criticized both kings and people for falling short of God’s ideal, but the lasting hope for a just, righteous, and prosperous society remained.

The Hardest Question *continued*

Considering these things reminds Christians that we serve the eternal King, who desires that we be the very agents of divine love and justice. Over and over, Jesus not only showed compassion for the poorest and neediest of the land, but instructed his followers to do the same.

If we would desire a just, righteous, and peacefully prosperous nation, we must go beyond praying for and voting for good leaders: the work of justice belongs to all of us.