

Homiletics Analysis: Psalms 110

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Psalm 110 is a royal-messianic psalm attributed to David, addressed to “my Lord” — a figure whom David acknowledges as superior to himself, seated at God’s right hand, and invested with both royal and priestly authority. The psalm moves in two oracular units, each introduced by a divine declaration (vv. 1–3 and vv. 4–7). The first oracle establishes the Davidic Lord’s enthronement at God’s right hand, his reign over enemies who will be made his footstool, and the willing service of his people in the day of his power. The second oracle — introduced by the LORD’s sworn oath — establishes this figure as “a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek,” an unprecedented fusion of royal and priestly identity that transcends the Levitical system entirely. The psalm closes with a compressed military portrait: the Lord executing judgment among the nations, crushing heads, and drinking from a brook in pursuit — the posture of a warrior who does not pause even in victory.

This Text — Intent

God’s intent through this psalm is to establish, beyond dispute, the supreme and universal authority of the coming Davidic King — not merely as a political ruler but as the one who holds together the roles of King, Priest, and Warrior-Judge in a single, eternal, divinely sworn office. The effect sought in the reader is not admiration for an ideal but submission to and trust in a living, reigning, interceding Lord. The psalm refuses to let the reader remain neutral. The enemies are being subdued. The priest-king is interceding. The question the text presses is: are you among the willing, coming “like dew from the womb of the morning,” or among those whose heads will be crushed? This is a psalm designed to produce worship, allegiance, and confident rest in the reigning Lord Jesus Christ.

Subject Sentence: The LORD installs His King-Priest as supreme Lord — enthroned, interceding, and conquering until all enemies yield.

Primary Claim: God is calling His people to unreserved allegiance and worshipful rest in the one He has sworn to install as eternal King and Priest — whose rule is already underway, whose intercession is perpetual, and whose victory over every enemy is certain.

Interpretive Evaluation

The identity of “my Lord” in verse 1

The interpretive fault line in Psalm 110 begins with verse 1: “*The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand.’*” The critical question — who is “my Lord”? — was already contested in Jesus’ day (Matthew 22:41–46), where Jesus uses the verse to press the Pharisees on the Davidic Messiah’s divine superiority over David himself. The standard Jewish interpretation in the Second Temple period sought a merely human referent: a great king (possibly David himself, or an idealized future Davidic ruler in purely human terms). This reading cannot survive the internal logic of the psalm: David writes it, David addresses someone as his Lord, and the Old Testament convention is that no son addresses his father as “my Lord.” The psalm itself demands a figure who is both of David’s line and superior to David. The New Testament authors — Matthew 22, Acts 2:34–36, Hebrews 1:13, 5:6–10, 7:1–28 — universally identify this figure as Jesus Christ, and Jesus himself treats the verse as decisive evidence of his own divine sonship. The Reformed reading is that Psalm 110:1 is a royal oracle in which David, under inspiration, addresses the pre-incarnate Son of God who will be incarnate as his descendant and installed as universal Lord at the resurrection and ascension. This is not a late reading imposed on the text — it is the reading the text demands, and the reading Jesus himself authorized.

The Melchizedek priesthood (verse 4) — Levitical reduction versus typological fulfillment

Some traditions (particularly streams of Judaism and occasionally Protestant readings oriented too narrowly toward the Levitical cult) read the Melchizedek reference as merely an archaic poetic device establishing royal legitimacy — a way of saying “this king is also priestly” without pressing the typological significance. This reading **qualifies** at best: it correctly notes the historical Melchizedek figure of Genesis 14, but it fails to account for the weight of the divine oath (“The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind”) and the explicit contrast with the Aaronic order (“after the order of Melchizedek,” not “after the order of Aaron”). The Book of Hebrews (chapters 5–7) unpacks with precision what Psalm 110:4 requires: a priesthood that does not depend on genealogy, that is not terminated by death, that does not require repeated sacrifice, and that is established by divine oath rather than Levitical appointment. This is not Christian importation — Hebrews is showing that the psalm itself already demanded more than Levi could provide. The Reformed reading — that the Melchizedek priesthood is a genuine Old Testament type pointing to Christ’s eternal, non-Levitical high priesthood — is the only reading that accounts for why God swears an oath, why the phrase “forever” appears, and why a different “order” is explicitly named.

The “day of his power” and willing people (verse 3) — corporate identity

Some dispensational readings take verse 3 as a reference to a future national Israel mustering for an end-times military campaign. This reading **refutes**: the verse’s imagery (“like dew from the womb of the morning,” “holy garments,” “your youth”) is cultic and

covenantal, not militaristic. The “willing people” are those who come freely in the day of the Messiah’s power — the New Testament pattern of Spirit-drawn, gospel-gathered people (cf. John 6:37–44; Ephesians 2:1–10). The dew imagery echoes Deuteronomy 32:2 and Hosea 14:5 — the regenerating, renewing work of God among His people, not an army muster. The Reformed reading identifies this verse as a description of gospel-era calling: the King’s reign produces a willing, freely-coming people, whose willing service is itself the fruit of divine power.

The final warrior portrait (vv. 5–7) — realized versus future eschatology

Charismatic and triumphalist streams occasionally read verses 5–7 as a call for the church to spiritually “take dominion” now in aggressive cultural engagement. While it is true that the psalm depicts a reign that is *presently* underway (the right hand enthronement of verse 1 is the ascension, already accomplished), the crushing of heads and final judgment language points to the eschatological completion of Christ’s reign at the Parousia, not to a church-growth strategy. The Reformed reading holds together the “already” (the King is enthroned, the enemies are in the process of being subdued — 1 Corinthians 15:25) and the “not yet” (the final subjugation, including death itself, awaits the return). The psalm gives the church confidence and rest, not a mandate for triumphalism.

Key Canonical Support

- **Genesis 14:18–20** — Melchizedek appears as king of Salem and priest of God Most High, blessing Abram and receiving tithes; Psalm 110:4 invokes this figure as the type of the Messiah’s eternal priesthood, establishing that a non-Levitical, royal-priestly office existed in Scripture before Levi was born.
- **2 Samuel 7:12–16** — The Davidic covenant establishes that one of David’s descendants will have a kingdom established forever; Psalm 110 fills out *how* that eternal reign functions — not through ordinary dynastic succession but through divine enthronement at God’s right hand.
- **Matthew 22:41–46** — Jesus cites Psalm 110:1 directly to demonstrate that the Messiah must be both David’s son and David’s Lord, pressing the Pharisees past a merely human messianic expectation; this is the New Testament’s own exegetical key to the psalm.
- **Acts 2:34–36** — Peter’s Pentecost sermon identifies the ascended Christ as the fulfillment of Psalm 110:1, establishing that the session at God’s right hand is not a future event but a present reality from the day of the resurrection; the psalm controls the apostolic preaching of Christ’s lordship.
- **Hebrews 7:1–28** — The extended exposition of the Melchizedek priesthood unpacks Psalm 110:4 in full: Christ holds an indestructible priesthood, is our perpetual intercessor, offered himself once for all, and requires no successor — the

oath of Psalm 110:4 is the New Testament's anchor for the sufficiency and finality of Christ's priestly work.

Aim: To demonstrate from Psalm 110 that Jesus Christ reigns now as enthroned King and interceding Priest — and to call the reader to the worshipful, confident allegiance that his present, active lordship demands.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1a	The LORD's oracle: "Sit at my right hand" — enthronement decree	YHWH speaks to Adonai; the divine right hand is the place of supreme honor and authority
1b	"Until I make your enemies your footstool" — subjugation promised	The "until" is not a limit on the reign but its operating horizon; enemies are in the process of being subdued
2	The LORD sends forth the scepter from Zion — rule in the midst of enemies	Active, present reign; not waiting until enemies are gone but reigning over and through the conflict
3	A willing people comes in the day of his power — holy garments, dew of youth	The King's power produces freely-coming, holy-adorned people; imagery of regeneration and gospel-gathering
4	The LORD's sworn oath: "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek"	Second divine oracle; sworn oath establishes irrevocability; the priesthood is eternal, non-Levitical, and unique
5	"The Lord is at your right hand" — the Lord strikes kings in the day of his wrath	Shift in perspective: now God stands at the Messiah's right hand in the day of battle; eschatological judgment
6	He executes judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses, crushing	Universal scope of judgment; "the head" may echo Genesis 3:15 — the

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	heads	decisive victory over the serpent's domain
7	He drinks from the brook in pursuit, lifts his head	The warrior does not stop; the lifted head signals victory achieved; confident, unstoppable advance

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1–3	The Royal Oracle: Enthronement, Reign, and the Willing People
2	4	The Priestly Oracle: The Eternal Melchizedek Priesthood
3	5–7	The Warrior Portrait: Judgment, Conquest, and Final Victory

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: The LORD installs His King-Priest as supreme Lord — enthroned, interceding, and conquering until all enemies yield.

Primary Claim: God is calling His people to unreserved allegiance and worshipful rest in the one He has sworn to install as eternal King and Priest — whose rule is already underway, whose intercession is perpetual, and whose victory over every enemy is certain.

Applications (Five)

1. Reckon with the present reality of Christ's reign rather than waiting for a future kingship that has already begun. (*Mind/Belief*) The single most common failure in reading Psalm 110 is to treat the enthronement as a future event still awaited. The apostolic preaching is unambiguous: Acts 2:34–36 declares that Jesus *is now* at the right hand — the session is a present, active reality from the moment of the ascension. The believer who says “I’m waiting for Christ to reign” has missed what the psalm is pressing. He is reigning. The enemies are being subdued. The scepter has gone out from Zion. Reorient your mental

model of history around this fact: you live in the era of Christ's active, victorious reign — not in the waiting room before it begins.

2. Rest in the intercession of a priest whose appointment cannot be revoked and whose work cannot be superseded. (*Affections/Worship*) The LORD swore an oath. He will not change his mind. There is no priesthood that will replace this one, no sacrifice that must be added to his, no moment when his advocacy before the Father lapses. The Christian who carries guilt-weight into prayer as though Christ's priesthood might be insufficient has not yet felt the force of Psalm 110:4. Let the sworn, irrevocable, eternal oath of God sink into your affections: your priest is not temporary, not limited, and not replaceable. Bring everything to him — not because you have cleaned yourself up sufficiently, but because his priesthood was established precisely for people who cannot.

3. Understand your own willingness to come to Christ as the fruit of his power, not the condition for it. (*Mind/Belief*) Verse 3 describes a “willing people” who come freely in the day of the King's power — and the imagery of dew (which no one produces, which simply appears as the gift of morning) signals that this willingness is itself the product of divine power. You did not come to Christ because you were sufficiently spiritually motivated. You came because his power produced your willingness. This is not a reason for passivity — it is a reason for gratitude and a guard against pride. The believer who thinks they chose Christ from their own spiritual resources has not yet understood verse 3. The dew does not generate itself.

4. Orient your view of suffering, opposition, and apparent Christian defeat around the “until” of verse 1 — the enemies are being made a footstool, not permitted to reign. (*Affections/Worship*) The “until I make your enemies your footstool” is not a concession — it is a promise in process. The Messiah reigns in the midst of enemies, not after they have already been eliminated. This means that the Christian facing genuine opposition, cultural hostility, or personal suffering is not living in a gap where Christ's reign is suspended. The enemies are not winning — they are in the process of being subdued. Let this reorient your experience of difficulty: you are not waiting for Christ to take charge; you are living inside the active movement of his reign toward its completion. Mourn what is genuinely to be mourned; but do not mourn as those who have no King.

5. Align yourself with the willing people of verse 3 by actively, freely, and repeatedly coming to the King — in worship, prayer, and surrender — rather than holding back for the resolution of your doubts or the cleaning up of your life. (*Will/Behavior*) The willing people come in “holy garments” — not because they arrived holy, but because the King's power adorns those who come. The application is concrete: come to worship this week even if you don't feel like it; come to prayer even if your record of prayer is poor; come to the means of grace even with unresolved questions, because these are the instruments of the King's power that produce the willingness he promises. Holding back until conditions are right is exactly the inverse of what the psalm depicts. The willing people come; the coming produces the willingness.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Psalm 110 is the most frequently cited Old Testament passage in the New Testament — and the reason is that it does more theological work than almost any other single text. It establishes that the coming Davidic King is also David's Lord, which requires a figure who is both human (of David's line) and divine (superior to David). It establishes that this figure holds together the royal and priestly offices in a single eternal person — resolving the Old Testament tension between the two offices (which were kept strictly separate under the Mosaic covenant) through a pre-Mosaic type that transcends both. It establishes that God's own sworn oath underwrites both the enthronement and the priesthood, making both irrevocable and eternal. And it establishes that the scope of this reign is universal — the nations, the kings, the final enemies — not parochially Israelite. Every major New Testament Christological claim finds support here: the divine sonship, the Lordship, the present session, the eternal intercession, the final judgment.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Reformed theology insists that Christ's three offices — Prophet, Priest, and King — are not separate functions awkwardly assigned to one person, but the integrated identity of the one Mediator. Psalm 110 is the Old Testament's most compressed expression of this integration: the King who reigns from God's right hand is simultaneously the Priest who intercedes forever. The Reformed understanding of Christ's work as completed, sufficient, and presently effective is grounded in this psalm: the once-for-all sacrifice of the Melchizedek priest is the basis for the present intercession of the enthroned King, which is the ground for the believer's present assurance and access. Furthermore, the "willing people" of verse 3 displays the Reformed doctrine of effectual calling in poetic form — the Spirit-regenerated willingness that brings people freely to Christ is itself the work of God's power, not the human precondition for it. The psalm refuses both a works-righteousness approach (you must clean yourself up before coming) and a passive fatalism (God will bring the elect without means) — the King reigns *through* the going out of his scepter-word into the world.

Main Takeaway

Jesus Christ is not waiting to be King — he is reigning right now, at the right hand of God, with a priesthood that God swore under oath and will never revoke, subduing every enemy in real time. You are not living in the gap before his reign begins; you are living inside it. Come to him as he is — not as a candidate for future authority, but as the eternal King-Priest who has already secured everything you need and who is already interceding for you. Stop managing your access to him. He is the priest. Come.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Treating the psalm as merely predictive rather than presently authoritative.** The most common homiletical failure with Psalm 110 is to use it primarily as a proof-text for Christ's deity and then move on, without pressing the *present-tense* claim of the psalm. The enthronement is not a future event to anticipate — it is a present reality to submit to. The sermon that says "someday Jesus will reign" has flatly contradicted Acts 2:34–36 and missed the psalm's driving intent. Every exposition of Psalm 110 must press the present lordship: *he is at the right hand now*.
- **Separating the Melchizedek priesthood from the believer's access and assurance.** Preachers who treat verse 4 as purely doctrinal — a technical point about Christ's priestly credentials — miss the pastoral weight of a divine *oath*. The oath is not there for theological credentialing; it is there because the believer needs to know that this priesthood cannot fail, expire, or be revoked. Preach verse 4 as the basis for the believer's unshakable access and the ground for rejecting all guilt-driven hesitation in prayer and worship.
- **Moralizing verse 3 into a call for human effort.** "Be a willing person!" — this is what the text does not say. The willingness is produced by the King's power, not contributed to it. Preaching verse 3 as a call to try harder to be spiritually motivated inverts the psalm's logic. The application is to *come* — precisely because the coming is the instrument of the power that produces the willingness, not the result of having already achieved it.
- **Softening the conquest language of verses 5–7 into inoffensiveness.** Contemporary preaching frequently smooths over the warrior imagery — the striking of kings, the crushing of heads, the corpse-filling of nations — as culturally embarrassing. But this imagery is doing essential theological work: it establishes that Christ's reign does not accommodate its enemies indefinitely, that there is a real day of wrath, and that those who are not among the willing people of verse 3 are among those whose heads are addressed in verse 6. The psalm is not gentle toward neutrality. Preaching it as though it were fails the congregation by removing the eschatological urgency that gives verse 3's invitation its weight.
- **Failing to show the Genesis 3:15 connection in verse 6.** "He will shatter heads over the wide earth" — the crushing of the head echoes the proto-evangelium's promise that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head. Whether or not every interpreter presses this connection, the preacher should at minimum note that the psalm's warrior imagery places this King within the redemptive-historical arc that runs from the garden through the cross to the final victory. This is not a military psalm about a human conqueror — it is the cosmic story of the serpent-crusher arriving at the end of his campaign.

- **Using the psalm only in doctrinal contexts and never in pastoral ones.** Because Psalm 110 is heavily cited in Christological and apologetic discussions, it risks becoming a pastor's proof-text rather than a congregation's comfort. But the psalm was written to a community that needed to know their King was winning. Preach it to the person who feels like the enemies — personal, cultural, spiritual — are prevailing. The scepter has gone out. The footstool is being prepared. The priest is interceding. The warrior does not stop to rest. Your King is not losing.