

Homiletics Analysis: Psalms 72

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Psalms 72 is a royal psalm — a prayer for the king — and stands as the closing psalm of Book II of the Psalter (72:20 marks the end of “the prayers of David the son of Jesse”). The psalm moves through a sustained petition on behalf of the king: that he would judge with righteousness and justice (vv. 1–4), that his reign would endure as long as the sun and moon (vv. 5–7), that his dominion would extend to the ends of the earth (vv. 8–11), and that his reign would be characterized by deliverance of the poor and crushing of the oppressor (vv. 12–14). The psalm then broadens into doxology, praying for the king’s perpetual flourishing (vv. 15–17) and closing with a benediction of praise to the LORD God of Israel whose glory fills the whole earth (vv. 18–19). The final verse (v. 20) is an editorial colophon closing Book II.

The argument of the psalm is covenantal and eschatological in shape from the outset. The petitions are not merely pragmatic wishes for political stability — they are requests that the king embody the divine attributes of righteousness, justice, and compassion, and that his reign accomplish what only a perfectly just and merciful ruler can accomplish. The accumulation of universal language (“all nations,” “to the ends of the earth,” “all kings shall fall down before him,” v. 11) strains beyond any historical Solomonic or Davidic fulfillment and presses toward a messianic horizon. The poor are not incidental — their deliverance is the mark of the true king (vv. 12–14), and the king’s global dominion is tethered to this concern for the most vulnerable.

This Text — Intent

God’s intent through Psalm 72 is to orient His people’s hope toward the only king who can actually deliver what this psalm demands. The psalm is structured as a prayer, but it functions as a prophetic vision: no earthly king has ever or could ever fully satisfy these petitions. Every Davidic king who read this psalm was simultaneously invited to aspire to its vision and confronted with his own inadequacy relative to it. The effect God seeks is a redirected and purified hope — not abandoning the Davidic covenant but following its trajectory to its ultimate destination in the King who perfectly embodies righteousness, rescues the poor, and reigns from sea to sea. The doxology at the end (vv. 18–19) is not a tacked-on addition — it is the psalm’s own interpretive key: only the LORD, whose name alone is blessed forever, can be the ultimate referent of a reign this glorious.

Subject Sentence: The ideal king reigns in righteousness, delivers the poor, and fills the earth with God's glory.

Primary Claim: God is drawing His people's hope through and beyond every human king toward the one King whose righteousness, compassion, and universal dominion fulfill what the Davidic covenant always promised — and sustaining that hope is itself an act of worship.

Interpretive Evaluation

The Solomonic Reading

The psalm's superscription ("Of Solomon," or possibly "For Solomon") has led many interpreters, particularly those in the historical-grammatical tradition without a robust typological hermeneutic, to read Psalm 72 as primarily or exclusively a coronation prayer for Solomon. On this reading, the universal language (vv. 8–11) is hyperbolic court language common in Ancient Near Eastern royal literature — not genuine eschatological prediction but conventional poetic inflation of a king's greatness. This reading is to be *acknowledged* insofar as the psalm does have a Solomonic occasion and the ANE parallels are real. Solomon's reign did represent a high-water mark of Davidic glory (1 Kings 4:20–21) and the temple-building project gave genuine substance to the nations-drawn-to-Zion motif.

However, this reading must be *qualified* significantly. The specific content of vv. 12–14 — the king's personal attention to the poor, needy, and oppressed — is precisely what Solomon failed to embody (1 Kings 12:4; his heavy taxation was the wound that split the kingdom). The historical referent strains against the ideal content. More importantly, the Reformed hermeneutical tradition rightly reads psalms typologically: the Davidic king is always a type, and the Psalter's own canonical placement of this psalm as the conclusion of Book II (ending with "the prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended") invites reflection on what kind of Davidic king these prayers were ultimately seeking.

The Purely Prophetic/Messianic Reading

At the other end, some interpreters (particularly within certain dispensational frameworks) read Psalm 72 as purely prophetic of the Millennial reign of Christ — the universal dominion of vv. 8–11 referring specifically to a future geopolitical kingdom, the tribute of nations literal rather than figurative, and the agricultural abundance of v. 16 a prediction of millennial conditions. This reading is to be *acknowledged* insofar as it correctly identifies the messianic trajectory of the psalm and refuses to reduce it to mere historical occasion.

However, this reading should be *qualified* where it collapses the psalm's typological function into a one-to-one prophecy chart. The strength of the psalm lies precisely in its

holding together of Davidic type and messianic antitype — it is not *only* about a future kingdom but about the whole movement of God’s covenant purposes through the Davidic line toward their fulfillment. A purely prophetic reading can inadvertently make the psalm inaccessible to the first-generation reader for whom it was also a real prayer about a real king.

The Reformed Typological Reading

The reading that best accounts for the full text in its literary, canonical, and historical context is a typological-messianic reading: the psalm is a genuine prayer for the Davidic king, but the petition is shaped by the covenantal ideal that no historical king could fully satisfy, and which therefore presses inevitably toward its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. This is not a reading *imposed* on the text — it is the reading the text itself invites through the universalism of its language (vv. 8–11), the compassion-toward-the-poor criterion (vv. 12–14), the eternal endurance of the name (v. 17), and the doxological frame (vv. 18–19). The New Testament’s application of this psalm to Christ (notably Revelation 11:15’s echo of v. 8; Matthew 2:11’s connection of the magi’s gifts to v. 10–11; and the broader use of v. 17 in connection with Abrahamic blessing) confirms the trajectory the text itself establishes. The Reformed reading retains the historical occasion, embraces the typological function, and follows the canonical arc to its Christological fulfillment.

Key Canonical Support

- **2 Samuel 7:12–16** — The Davidic covenant that grounds this psalm: God promises a son of David whose kingdom will be established forever. Psalm 72 is the *prayer* that the covenant’s promises would be realized. The eternal throne of v. 5 and the enduring name of v. 17 are covenant-language.
- **Isaiah 11:1–5** — The Branch from Jesse who judges the poor with righteousness and decides with equity for the meek — the same criteria Psalm 72 uses (vv. 2, 4, 12–14). Isaiah’s messianic vision fills out what Psalm 72 only sketches.
- **Isaiah 60:1–3, 10–12** — Nations streaming to Zion, kings bringing tribute, the glory of the LORD filling the earth — the eschatological fulfillment of Psalm 72’s vision of universal dominion exercised through the Servant-King.
- **Matthew 2:1–12** — The magi’s arrival with gold and incense directly echoes Psalm 72:10–11, 15. Matthew’s narrative is not incidentally parallel — it is a canonical marker that this King has arrived and these petitions have begun their fulfillment.
- **Revelation 11:15; 21:24–26** — “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” The nations bringing their glory into the New Jerusalem is the consummation of what Psalm 72 prays. The psalm’s eschatological reach finds its terminus here.

Aim: To lead readers to see Jesus Christ as the complete and only fulfillment of the Davidic ideal, and to redirect their deepest political, social, and eschatological hopes toward His reign alone.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1	Opening petition: give the king Your justice and righteousness	“Your justice” — the king’s righteousness is derived, not autonomous; immediately covenantal
2	The king judges the people with righteousness and the poor with justice	Two objects: “your people” and “your poor people” — the poor specifically named from the outset
3	Mountains and hills yield prosperity “by righteousness”	Righteousness produces shalom in creation — the king’s justice has cosmological effects
4	He defends the poor, saves the children of the needy, crushes the oppressor	Tri-part: defend, save, crush — action verbs; the oppressor is the king’s specific enemy
5	May he endure as long as the sun and moon	Eternal duration petition begins — this strain cannot be satisfied by any mortal king
6	Like rain on mown grass, like showers watering the earth	Agricultural imagery: the king’s presence brings life and refreshment; gentle power
7	In his days righteousness flourishes, peace abounds until the moon is no more	“Righteousness flourishes” — not merely enforced but organic, abundant; eschatological horizon
8	May he rule from sea to sea, from the River to the ends of the earth	Universal dominion language; “the River” = Euphrates, the covenant boundary of Promised Land

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
		expanded
9	Desert tribes bow; enemies lick the dust	Total submission of adversaries
10	Kings of Tarshish and coastlands bring tribute; kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts	Tarshish (west/far trade routes) and Sheba (south/east) = comprehensive geographic submission
11	All kings fall down before him; all nations serve him	Universalism explicit: “all kings,” “all nations” — this exceeds any historical fulfillment
12–13	He delivers the needy who cries, the poor who has no helper; pity on the weak and needy, saving their lives	The ground of dominion is compassion — authority exercised in rescue
14	He redeems their life from oppression and violence; their blood is precious in his sight	“Precious in his sight” — the lives of the most marginalized are valued by the ideal king
15	Long life to him; continual prayer for him; daily blessing	Community prayer sustaining the king — and anticipating the intercessory role of the great King
16	Abundance of grain on the earth; fruit flourishes; people blossom like grass	Agricultural abundance as sign of royal shalom; echoes Edenic fruitfulness
17	His name endures forever; blessed as long as the sun; all nations call him blessed; all nations blessed through him	Key verse: Abrahamic blessing language (“all nations blessed through him”) — Genesis 12:3 echo; covenant fulfillment
18–19	Doxology: Blessed be the LORD God of Israel who alone does wondrous things; blessed be His glorious name forever; earth filled with His glory	The king’s glory resolves into the LORD’s glory — God is the ultimate king; doxology is the psalm’s own interpretive key
20	The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended	Editorial colophon closing Book II; not part of the

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
		psalm's content per se but significant as canonical marker

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1–4	The Righteous King: Justice as the Foundation of True Rule
2	5–7	The Enduring King: His Reign Outlasts the Created Order
3	8–11	The Universal King: All Nations Submit to His Dominion
4	12–14	The Compassionate King: His Power Exercised in Rescue of the Poor
5	15–17	The Blessed King: His Name and Blessing Extend to All Nations
6	18–19	Doxology: The King's Glory Flows Into the LORD's Glory

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: The ideal king reigns in righteousness, delivers the poor, and fills the earth with God's glory.

Primary Claim: God is drawing His people's hope through and beyond every human king toward the one King whose righteousness, compassion, and universal dominion fulfill what the Davidic covenant always promised — and sustaining that hope is itself an act of worship.

Applications (Five)

1. Recalibrate where you place your political hope. (*Mind/Belief*) Every election cycle, every political leader, every policy platform generates in us either hope or despair — and both responses, when absolute, reveal that we have located in a human king what only the

Divine King can provide. Psalm 72 does not forbid political engagement or concern for good governance. But it frames every human ruler as a partial approximation at best and a failed approximation most of the time. The Christian who reads this psalm and then returns to the political news cycle should find their grip loosening — not from indifference, but from the recognition that the King who actually satisfies these petitions has already been identified, and He is not on any ballot.

2. Let the persistent failure of earthly rulers drive you to Christ, not to cynicism.

(Mind/Belief) Psalm 72 is calibrated to disappoint. Every historical Davidic king — including Solomon, its named occasion — fell short of its vision. That gap is not an accident. It is the hermeneutical engine of the psalm: the prayer is designed to outrun its fulfillment until the King comes who can actually answer it. When leaders disappoint, institutions fail, and the powerful continue to crush the poor, the Christian response is not “nothing ever changes” but “this is why we need the King this psalm is really about.” The disillusionment is a homiletical device pointing toward Christ.

3. Let the King’s concern for the poor reshape your own. *(Affections/Worship)* The ideal king in Psalm 72 does not merely not oppress the poor — he personally attends to them, considers their blood precious (v. 14), and defines his reign by their liberation. If Jesus is the fulfillment of this king, then the community that follows Him should bear the same mark. The question is not whether your church has a generosity fund, but whether the poor are visible in your life — whether those with no helper can find one in you. The psalm should produce not guilt but a re-orientation of affection: the King I love loves the poor. I want to share His affections.

4. Worship the LORD as the only king whose name endures forever.

(Affections/Worship) The doxology of vv. 18–19 is not a postscript — it is the psalm’s destination. All the petitions for the human king ultimately resolve into praise for the LORD whose glory fills the whole earth. The psalm trains the heart to move from longing for a perfect king to praising the God who is Himself that king. Worship in the presence of Psalm 72 should feel like the exhale after a long held breath: the King I have been waiting for, whose rule I have prayed for, is the LORD Himself — and He has come in His Son, and He will come again. This is not the occasion for mild appreciation. This is the occasion for the kind of praise that fills a room.

5. Pray for Christ’s return and the completion of His reign with the same urgency as the psalmist’s petitions. *(Will/Behavior)* The psalm is structured as prayer — sustained, specific, comprehensive petition for the king’s reign to expand and his justice to prevail. The New Testament counterpart to this prayer is “Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as in heaven,” and more specifically, “Come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20). If Psalm 72 describes what Christ’s full reign looks like — righteousness, rescue of the poor, universal submission, earth filled with glory — then the Christian’s prayer life should bear these petitions. Concretely: make “the advance of Christ’s kingdom and the justice it brings” a specific and regular category of your intercession, not a vague background hope.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Psalm 72 teaches that legitimate authority is derived authority — the king asks for *God's* justice and *God's* righteousness (v. 1), not the cultivation of his own. This has profound implications for every theology of human governance: rulers are stewards of divine justice, not its source, and they are accountable to a standard they did not invent. The psalm further teaches that the measure of a ruler's righteousness is not military power or economic prosperity alone but the condition of the most vulnerable — the poor, the needy, those who have no helper (vv. 12–14). This criterion is not a peripheral concern but the central evidence for whether a king is truly just. Finally, the psalm's doxological conclusion (vv. 18–19) teaches that the glory of the perfect king is ultimately the glory of God — human kingship at its best is a transparent window onto divine kingship, and the praise it generates must finally be directed not at the human instrument but at the LORD.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Psalm 72 is a key text in the Reformed understanding of the Davidic covenant as a typological structure pointing toward Christ. The Reformed tradition, following the hermeneutic of Calvin (who read this psalm as explicitly messianic) and developed through the Westminster Assembly's redemptive-historical framework, reads the Davidic kings not as isolated historical figures but as progressive types whose inadequacy drives the reader toward the antitype. The psalm also bears directly on the Reformed insistence that grace, not human achievement, drives the kingdom forward — the king asks for righteousness to be *given*, not cultivated, and the agricultural imagery (vv. 6, 16) presents kingdom advance as organic, God-granted growth rather than programmatic conquest. The gospel is doing real work here: the King who satisfies Psalm 72 is the one who accomplished righteousness on behalf of His people and now intercedes for them (v. 15 anticipating the intercessory ministry of Christ), ensuring that every petition the psalm raises is ultimately answered in Him.

Main Takeaway

Every king you have ever looked to for justice, security, or salvation has fallen short of this psalm — and that is the point. The petition was always bigger than any human king could answer. Jesus Christ is the king Psalm 72 was always seeking: the one who judges with perfect righteousness, whose dominion extends to every nation, who considers the blood of the poorest person precious, and whose name will be blessed forever. Stop looking for what only He can give from anyone else. And come — with the full urgency of this psalm — before the One who already reigns and will soon fill the earth with His glory.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Treating the psalm as primarily a leadership lesson.** The most common homiletical error with Psalm 72 is domesticating it into a model for human leaders — “this is what good governance looks like,” “here are five characteristics of a righteous leader.” While the psalm does contain genuine ideals for human rule, reducing it to a leadership framework suppresses its eschatological pressure and misses the interpretive clue that no human king has ever satisfied it. The sermon should pass through any application to human leadership *toward* its fulfillment in Christ, not stop at the human application.
- **Ignoring the poor in vv. 12–14.** The psalm returns to the theme of the poor, needy, and oppressed three times (vv. 2, 4, 12–14). This is not incidental ornamentation — it is the defining criterion of the ideal king’s righteousness. Exposition that lingers on the universal dominion sections (vv. 8–11) while passing quickly over vv. 12–14 produces a distorted picture of the king the psalm envisions, and a distorted picture of the Christ who fulfills it.
- **Treating v. 17’s Abrahamic echo as incidental.** The phrase “all nations shall be blessed through him” (v. 17) is a direct citation of Genesis 12:3 / 22:18 — the Abrahamic covenant blessing. This is not stylistic parallel but canonical linkage: the psalm explicitly identifies the Davidic king as the vehicle through whom the Abrahamic promise reaches all nations. Preachers who miss this connection miss the deepest covenantal structure of the psalm and lose the connective tissue between Abraham, David, and Christ.
- **Separating the doxology (vv. 18–19) from the psalm’s argument.** It is easy to treat vv. 18–19 as a liturgical appendix rather than the psalm’s own interpretive conclusion. In fact, the doxology interprets the whole: the king’s glory is the LORD’s glory; the perfect reign prayed for is ultimately God’s own reign. Preachers should land here deliberately — the psalm ends not with the king but with God, and the exposition should too.
- **Missing the eschatological tension.** The psalm is written in the optative mood (may he, let him) — it is prayer and vision, not flat description. Preachers must honor this structure: the psalm lives in the tension between “not yet” and “coming.” Over-realized eschatology (acting as if the kingdom is already fully present) and under-realized eschatology (deferring everything to a future millennium) both suppress the psalm’s proper force. The right posture is the posture the psalm itself embodies: urgent prayer, confident hope, eyes fixed on the King who has come and is coming again.
- **Preaching the “Solomon” superscription against the messianic reading.** Some preachers, encountering the “Of/For Solomon” superscription, feel methodologically obligated to confine the psalm to its Solomonic occasion and

resist the messianic reading as eisegesis. This is a category error. The superscription identifies the occasion; the content of the psalm strains beyond that occasion in ways the text itself signals. Canonical and typological hermeneutics are not imposed from outside — they are the reading strategy the psalm invites.