

~Other Speakers M-R: Edward Payson:

I am a great King, saith the Lord of Hosts.Â—MALACHI I. 14.

WHEN God would inform his creatures what he is, he must employ language suited to their capacities; language, which they can understand. What he is himself indeed, or what constitutes his essence, no language can describe; and therefore even he cannot inform us. He can only say, I am what I am. But what he is to his creatures, and what relations he sustains with respect to them, may without difficulty be stated in language sufficiently intelligible. We all understand the import of the titles, father, master, and sovereign or king; and know something of the relations which these titles involve. With a view to inform us what he is to his creatures, God assumes by turns each of these titles, and represents himself as sustaining each of these relations. Sometimes he styles himself a father, sometimes a master, and sometimes, as in the passage before us, a king. I am a great king, saith the Lord of hosts.

Jehovah is a great king. This is evidently the truth taught in our text. And it is a most important truth, a truth richly fraught with instruction. My design is to illustrate briefly this truth, and then to state, at considerable length, some of the important consequences which result from it.

I. Jehovah is a king. A king, you are sensible, is the political head, or supreme ruler of a kingdom. Of kings, writers on the subject of royalty usually mention two kinds,Â—kings by right, and kings in fact. A king by right, is one who has a right to the throne, though he may not possess it. A king in fact, is one who actually possesses the throne, though he may have no right to it. But he alone, in whom both the right and the possession are united, can justly be considered as, in all respects, a king. Such a king, in the fullest and most extensive sense of the term, is Jehovah. In the first place, he is a king in fact. His kingdom is the whole created universe, and of this kingdom he is in actual and full possession. He is its sole and absolute sovereign; he has no partners, no counselors, but governs every thing according to the counsel of his own will; doing his pleasure in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; nor can any one stay his hand, or say unto him, what doest thou? In passages far too numerous to mention particularly, the inspired writers represent him as exercising the most complete and uncontrollable authority over all his creatures, and ruling, with the same unlimited power, the kingdoms of nature, of providence, and of grace. If any deny that Jehovah thus governs the universe, they must suppose that it is governed by chance, that is, by nothing; for chance is only another word for nothing. But to suppose that the universe is governed by nothing is no less absurd than to suppose that it was created by nothing; and none but the fool, who says in his heart there is no God, will suppose either the one or the other.

In the second place, Jehovah is a king by right. He is not only the actual, but the rightful sovereign of the universe. He has the best of all possible titles to his kingdom; for he formed it of nothing and constantly upholds every part of it. Nor can a single individual of the human race deny, with the least shadow of truth or propriety, that Jehovah is his rightful sovereign. It has ever been allowed, that, with some few immaterial exceptions, all who are born in the dominions of any monarch, are his rightful subjects, at least so long as they continue to reside in them. But all men were born in the dominions of Jehovah, for the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. And they all reside in his dominions; nor can they possibly leave them; for his empire is, in the most unqualified sense, universal. Ascend into heaven, or make your bed in hell; fly to the East or to the West, to the planets, or to the fixed stars; still you are in the dominions of Jehovah no less than while you remain on the earth. Men cannot then cease to be his subjects, without ceasing to exist. It appears therefore, that he is, in every sense of the word, a king. And besides a kingdom and subjects, he possesses all the insignia of royalty. He has a throne; for heaven is his throne, and earth his footstool. He has a crown; for he is crowned with glory and honor and immortality. He has royal robes; for he is clothed with light and majesty as with a garment. Properly speaking indeed, he alone is a king, for earthly monarchs are no less accountable to him than are their meanest subjects. By him kings reign and princes decree justice; he is King of kings and Lord of lords. Even the thrones and dominions, the principalities and powers, in heavenly places, are but his ministering servants, who with humble reference and alacrity execute his will.

But this leads us to remark,

II. That Jehovah is a great King. He is so indeed in every conceivable, every possible respect; for, great is the Lord, and his greatness is unsearchable. Every thing that can with propriety be considered as constituting regal

greatness, he possesses in a degree which places him at an immeasurable distance from all comparison, all competition. Do men, for instance, take the measure of a monarch's greatness from the extent of his dominions, and the number of his subjects? And what monarch can in this respect be compared with Jehovah? The extent of his dominions has never yet been measured, except by his own infinite mind; nor by any other mind have his subjects been numbered. We talk of great and mighty kingdoms on earth; but the whole earth is a mere speck in his empire, and all its inhabitants as nothing before him. Are the duration and stability of his empire considered as entering into the composition of a monarch's greatness? God is the King eternal. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. Earthly kingdoms rise and fall, as bubbles rise and burst on the surface of the troubled ocean; but his kingdom is a kingdom which cannot be moved, and like himself it has no end. He not only lives, but reigns, forever and ever. Do magnificent works and splendid enterprises render a monarch great? Among the gods, O Lord, there is none like thee, neither are there any works like thy works. Or, in fine, does the true greatness of a monarch consist in his intellectual and moral qualifications for the station which he fills? It is needless to remark that Jehovah possesses, in an infinite degree, all the intellectual and moral qualities which are necessary for a sovereign; for the sovereign of an empire immeasurable in extent and duration. Unlike earthly princes, he is constantly present in all parts of his dominions, extensive as they are; the past, the present and the future are alike under his eye, and he is as accessible to the least as to the greatest of his subjects. Indeed all the wisdom, goodness, justice and fortitude which either rulers or their subjects ever possessed, were derived from him; for he is the father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift. All the intellectual and moral excellence in the universe is but a drop from this ocean; but a ray from this sun.

And now let mortals bring forward their monarchs, their conquerors, their heroes, their great ones, in whom they boast, and whose praises they are proud to sing; and compare them, if they dare, with the King mentioned in our text. Compare them, did I say? I recall the word. It is an insult to Jehovah to speak of comparing anything with him. But what are they in his presence? Mere puppets, shadows, nothings. Well might an apostle say, He that glorieth let him glory in the Lord. Well might the psalmist exclaim, It is better to trust in Jehovah than to put confidence in princes.

Having thus attempted to illustrate the assertion that Jehovah is a great King, I shall proceed to state some of the important consequences which result from the fact that he is so.

1. If God is a king, he is under obligations to make laws for his subjects. It will not, I presume, be denied that when he assumes any office he binds himself to perform all the duties of that office. Now it is the first and most indispensable duty of an absolute sovereign to make laws for his subjects. It is as much his duty to make laws, as it is their duty to obey them when made. Justice, benevolence, regard to the welfare of his kingdom, all require of him the performance of this duty. Indeed it seems impossible that an absolute sovereign should not make laws in some form or other; for as an intelligent being he must have a will; if he has a will he cannot but express it, and the expressions of an absolute sovereign's will are laws. We are therefore, I conceive, warranted to assert that God could not avoid making laws for his creatures without ceasing to be their king. But he could not cease to be their king without renouncing all connection with them; and he could not renounce all connection with them, without their ceasing to exist. So long therefore, as creatures continue to exist, it seems absolutely necessary in the very nature of things, that God, as their Creator and Sovereign should make laws for the regulation of their conduct. In no intelligible sense can he be a king; no intelligible meaning can we assign to the assertion in our text, unless he has actually made such laws.

2. If Jehovah is a king, he is under obligations, not only to make laws for his subjects, but to make the wisest and best laws possible. This, I presume, will not be denied. All will allow that a legislator ought to make the best laws in his power; not such laws as will please the violent or the fraudulent, but such as will most effectually secure the rights and promote the welfare of his obedient subjects. Such laws then, Jehovah, as the Sovereign and supreme Legislator of the universe, was bound to make for his rational creatures. It was incumbent on him to consult not the private wishes and inclinations of individuals but the great interests of his whole kingdom. If he saw that these interests would be best secured by a law, commanding all his intelligent subjects to be perfectly holy; to love their Creator with all their hearts, and their fellow creatures as themselves, it was incumbent on him to make such a law. Such a law he has made, a law which all his obedient subjects declare to be holy and just and good; and with which none but the rebellious and wicked are dissatisfied.

3. If Jehovah is the great Sovereign of the universe, he was under obligations, not only to make such a law, but to annex some penalty to every violation of it. A law without a penalty annexed, is not a law; or, at least, it can in no respect answer the purpose of a law. Of this every person may be convinced in a moment, by endeavoring to conceive of a law without a penalty. I make a law, says a legislator, to this effect. But what, his subjects ask, will be the consequence if we transgress this law? 'Will any punishment be inflicted on us? None at all, is the

reply. It must be obvious to every one that this would be a law in name only. It would be no more than counsel or advice. If then it was incumbent on God to make laws for his creatures, it was no less incumbent on him to annex a punishment to every violation of those laws. Hence also it became necessary that he should provide a proper place for the infliction of this punishment, a prison in which the transgressors of this law might be confined, and thus prevented from doing further mischief. Such a prison, we are informed he has provided; its name is hell; no one who believes that God is a king can, consistently, entertain doubts of its existence; for who ever heard of a king that had no prison in his dominions?

4. If Jehovah, as the Sovereign of the universe, was bound to make laws for his creatures, and to annex a punishment to their violation, he is also bound to enforce those laws, and to inflict the threatened punishment on all who transgress them. Every consideration which proves that it is incumbent on him to make laws, equally proves that it is incumbent on him to enforce them, and of course to punish transgressors; for it is obvious that a law not enforced becomes a mere nullity, and that a threatened punishment not inflicted is an empty sound. But it is the duty of a sovereign not to suffer salutary laws to become a nullity. It is as much his duty to enforce them, as it was to make them. He must not bear the sword in vain, but be a terror to evil doers. Inspiration declares, He who justifieth the wicked and he who condemneth the just are both an abomination to the Lord. Hence it appears that to justify the wicked, or to exempt them from merited punishment, is in the sight of God, no less an act of injustice than to condemn the innocent. That it ought to be thus considered is obvious. Justice in a sovereign ruler consists in treating his subjects according to their deserts. He may therefore be guilty of injustice by treating them better than they deserve, as well as by treating them worse than they deserve. But God cannot act unjustly. — he cannot do that himself which he would regard as an abomination if done by an earthly monarch. He must then, as the sovereign of the universe, punish those who transgress his great law of love, and shut them up in the prison which he has prepared for that purpose; nor would he be either a just or a good king should he act otherwise. A proper attention to this truth will show us the fallacy of the most plausible objections which are urged by sinners against the scriptural doctrine of future punishment. They profess to regard God as a father only, and hence infer that since men are his children he will suffer none of them to be finally miserable. But it must be remembered that if he is a father, he is also a king; and that as such he is under obligations to enforce the laws of his kingdom; and to punish, even though he may do it with reluctance, all who transgress them. When the king and father meet in one person, the feelings of the father must give way to the duties of the king. The page of history records at least one instance in which a father was called to sit in judgment on his own sons accused of conspiring against the state. The charge was fully proved. It became the duty of their father, as judge, to pronounce the sentence of the law. It was death, a painful and shameful death. He pronounced the sentence. He saw it executed; and all succeeding ages have applauded the inflexible regard to justice which enabled him to sacrifice parental affection to the public good. And shall man be more just than Gods? Shall that justice which was applauded in a human magistrate be stigmatized as cruelty, when displayed by the eternal sovereign of the universe?

5. From the fact that God is a king, taken in connection with the preceding remarks, we may learn the necessity of an atonement for sin. By an atonement we mean something which shall maintain the authority of God's law, secure the great interests of his kingdom and answer all the ends of government, no less effectually than the infliction of merited punishment upon transgressors. If there is any truth in the remarks which have been made, it undeniably follows, that without such an atonement God cannot consistently with justice or with his obligations as a sovereign, pardon a single offender. Agreeably an apostle informs us that God hath set forth Jesus Christ to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus; language, which most evidently intimates that were it not for this merciful provision, God could not be just in justifying or pardoning transgressors. And we may add, language which intimates with equal clearness, that notwithstanding this merciful provision he can justly pardon none who do not believe.

6. If Jehovah is a king, sin is treason and rebellion, and every impenitent sinner is a traitor and a rebel. These epithets have, I am aware, a harsh and unpleasant sound; and I should think it improper, or at least inexpedient to employ them, did not the language of inspiration warrant their use. But in many passages of the inspired volume, sin is styled rebellion, and the words sinner and rebel are used as convertible terms. A moment's reflection will satisfy us that this language is perfectly just and proper. A rebel is one who disobeys and resists the authority of his rightful sovereign. Of this every impenitent sinner is guilty. He disobeys the great Sovereign of the universe. He neither loves God with all his heart, nor his neighbor as himself. By refusing to repent he practically justifies his disobedience, and in effect denies that Jehovah is his sovereign. He must then be regarded as guilty of rebellion. Equally obvious is it that he incurs the guilt of treason. Every subject is guilty of this offence who entertains and cherishes the known enemies of his prince. Now sin is the great enemy of Jehovah considered as a king. It directly tends to subvert his government. It strikes at the very foundations of his throne. Could it universally prevail, it would not leave him one loyal subject in the universe. This enemy to

the King of kings every impenitent sinner entertains and cherishes in his heart. He is then guilty of treason against his sovereign. And it must be remembered that the criminality of treason and rebellion against God as far exceeds that of the same offences against earthly rulers, as he is superior to them. If these crimes when committed against earthly rulers are justly punishable with death, the same crimes committed against the great Sovereign of the universe must surely deserve eternal death, the punishment denounced by his law upon transgressors. We may here add, that if every impenitent sinner is a rebel, every Christian is a pardoned rebel. He was once a sinner, an impenitent sinner, deeply involved in the guilt of rebellion against Jehovah. But repentance and remission of sins have been freely given him through that Savior in whom he believes. He ought then ever to feel and act in a corresponding manner. You can easily conceive how a rebel ought to feel, who, after, his head was laid upon the block, had received a free pardon from his injured sovereign. You can conceive how penitent, how humble, how grateful. how entirely devoted to his prince's service he ever after ought to be. Much more then may such a temper and such conduct be expected of those whom God has pardoned. While they rejoice in what they are, they should never forget what they were. They should never forget that they were once rebels against the greatest and best of sovereigns, and that by his rich mercy and grace alone they have been rescued from everlasting burnings. Hence they should walk softly before God all their days in deep humility of soul; and while they approach him with confidence as a father, remember that he is also a great and glorious king, who must be worshipped with reverence and godly fear. It was for the purpose of enforcing this duty that he revealed himself as a king in the passage before us. The impious and covetous Jews, though expressly commanded to offer in sacrifice such animals only as were free from blemish, insulted him by bringing to his altar the lame and the blind. This insult he deeply resented, and he assigns his regal character as a reason why he would punish those who opposed it. Cursed be the deceiver who voweth and offereth to the Lord a corrupt thing; for I am a great king, and my name is dreadful, saith the Lord of Hosts. My Christian friends, how often do we, in consequence of the coldness, irreverence, and formality with which we approach the altar of God, offer him a corrupt thing! When he looks upon his worshipping assemblies, how often does he find reason to say as he said formerly, It is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Permit me to express a hope that he will never find reason to say this of the solemn meetings which may be held in this house of prayer. Permit me to charge you, by his awful majesty, and to beseech you, by his tender mercies, never to forget what he is, and what you are, when you approach his throne of grace, and to remember that God is greatly to be feared in the assemblies of his saints; and to be had in reverence by all that are about him. A practical remembrance of his truth is indispensable to your religious interests; for it cannot be expected that God will visit a temple where he is treated with irreverence, and unless he favors you with his gracious visits, it will be in vain that his word is sent to you.

Omitting many other important inferences which might be drawn from this fruitful subject, I remark,

Lastly, If Jehovah is a king it seems requisite that he should have ambassadors. It is necessary that his will should be communicated to his subjects. It is necessary that his revolted subjects should be called upon to return to their allegiance. If a way has been opened in which they may escape the punishment which his law denounces upon transgressors, and regain his forfeited favor, it is necessary that way should be pointed out. For these purposes it seems desirable and proper that ambassadors should be employed. Agreeably. we are informed that God has seen fit to employ them. His inspired messengers the prophets and apostles, were ambassadors extraordinary. They had a commission and instructions with the broad seal of heaven affixed to them. Now then, said one of them, we are ambassadors for Christ. In an inferior sense, the ordinary ministers of the gospel are also his ambassadors, for the same passage which informs us that he gave prophets and apostles for the work of the ministry, informs us also that he gave pastors and teachers for the same important work. It is not indeed usual for earthly monarchs to send ambassadors to rebellious subjects, except when they are unable to reduce them to subjection by force. This however, the King of kings condescends to do. Though he is able with infinite ease to tread all his rebellious subjects in the dust, and even to dash them in pieces as a potter's vessel, he chooses rather to send them messages of mercy, to propose to them terms of peace. Nay, more, he beseeches them to accept of those terms. As though God did beseech you by us, says an apostle, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

**APPLICATION.** You have heard, my fellow mortals, that God is a King. You have heard his own awful voice announcing the fact. You have listened to an imperfect description of his greatness. You have been reminded that you are all his subjects. Turn then, subjects of Jehovah, and contemplate your Sovereign. See him coming forth from that unapproachable light, in which he dwells, and disclosing his ineffable glories to your view, embodied in his works of creation, of providence, and of grace. See him seated on a throne of glory high and lifted up, while celestial thrones and dominions, principalities and powers veil their faces and bow in humble adoration before the thrice holy Lord of hosts. See his almighty arm, in which dwells everlasting strength, swaying the scepter of uncontrolled dominion over all creatures and all worlds; while from his lips goes forth his eternal, immutable law, demanding perfect obedience from the whole intelligent universe. But hark! He



speaks, he proclaims his name. O earth, earth, earth, listen to the voice of thy Creator and thy King. Let the universe keep silence, while he says, I am what I am. I am Jehovah, Jehovah God, merciful and gracious, long suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin; but will by no means clear the guilty. Mortals, you have seen, you have heard. Say then, is this your king? In fact and by right he most certainly is so. Whether you acknowledge him or not, he is so. But is he the sovereign of your choice, the monarch of your affection? This, this, my hearers, is the question; your answer to which determines your character and your destiny; for most sinful is the man, and most miserable is the man, who, while necessitated to be forever a subject of Jehovah, says in his heart, I will not have this being to reign over me; who cannot comply with the command which says, The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice. In order to answer the great question, you must ascertain whether you yield a cheerful obedience to his commands; for they only are his loyal, his willing subjects who cheerfully obey him. Know ye not, says an apostle, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey? Say then, my hearers, do you thus obey him? Do you love him supremely? Have you repented of all your past transgressions of his law, and cordially embraced the gospel of his Son? Are you seeking first his kingdom and righteousness, and living a life of devotedness to his service, of self-denial, watchfulness and prayer? If so, you are his loyal subjects; nay more, his children, the children of a king, of the King of heaven; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ of his everlasting kingdom; and you shall not only live with him, but reign with him forever. Let the Christian then rejoice in his sovereign; let the children of Zion be joyful in their king. Nor let them fear that their joy will ever know a termination; for the Lord shall reign king forever, even thy God, O Zion, throughout all generations. But if Jehovah is not the chosen monarch of your affections; if his law is not written in your hearts; if you are not yielding a cordial obedience to its requirements; then you are not his loyal, willing subjects; you are still involved in the guilt of treason and rebellion against the King of kings; and unless you speedily submit and become reconciled to his government, he will be constrained to consider and to treat you as enemies. It will avail nothing to call in question his right to be your sovereign. You were all born in his dominions; you still reside in them, and in them you must forever continue to reside. It will avail nothing to think of resistance. He is almighty. It will avail nothing to think of flight or concealment. He is every where present, and he sees all things. It will avail nothing to make excuses for disobedience. He perfectly knows their fallacy. It will avail nothing to offer him pretended homage: He demands, and he reads the heart. Your only refuge, your only safety lies in submission, cordial, unreserved submission. To this, as his messengers, we now call and invite you. In his name, and as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.