

THE PSALM OF THE KING

Psalm 2

Psalm 2 is closely connected to Psalm 1. Both Jewish and Christian traditions indicate they were once considered one psalm. The two are separate psalms in our Bibles. Yet they stand together as the introduction to the Psalms. In a real sense, these two psalms seems out of place. Psalm 1 would fit better in the wisdom literature of Proverbs. Psalm 2 would fit better in the messianic passages of the prophets. But here they are as a passageway into the psalms. They remind us that the psalms are not merely ancient Hebrew poetry. The Book of Psalms is more than the hymnbook of the Jews. It is God-breathed scripture that finds its fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Psalm 1 contrasts the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked and bids us to choose which way we will live. Psalm 2 warns there are consequences to the choice we make. Psalm 1 affirms the Lord's authority over INDIVIDUALS. Psalm 2 affirms the Lord's authority over NATIONS. Both realities are essential to our confidence in God. It is difficult to trust that God has control of the events of your life if you do not trust that God has control of the unfolding and outworking of history. But it is easy to trust that God has your life in his hands if you trust that God has the world in his hands. This is the message of Psalm 2. It was assurance that no one can stand against God's chosen kings and God's chosen people. It is also assurance for the church today. Psalm 2 is classified as a royal psalm, meaning it speaks beyond its historical context and points to the Messiah-King, the Lord Jesus Christ. All who trust in Christ can be comforted by the fact that Jesus reigns. It may not seem that way as you look at the world around you. But it is still true. Jesus reigns.

On D-Day – June 6, 1944 – the Allied forces invaded Normandy, ensuring victory in World War II. Yet the war continued until V-Day – May 7, 1945 – when the peace treaty was signed. Sadly, more people were killed between D-Day and V-Day than any other period of the war. Likewise, we live between the inauguration of the kingdom in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ and its consummation when he returns. In this present-but-not-yet-kingdom, it often seems the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus has not really changed anything. But no matter how things may seem, Jesus reigns over heaven and earth. Psalm 2 declares the unimpeachable authority of Jesus in four movements.

I. THE REBELLION OF SIN

We do not know the author or occasion of this psalm. It is like walking into the movie in the middle of the drama. Verse 1 asks, "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?" This rhetorical question speaks of a multinational or international movement. The nature of this movement is described two ways. THE NATIONS RAGE. People of various races, nationalities, and ethnicities assemble together tumultuously, like an angry mob ready to riot. But this mob scene is no emotional reaction or fit of passion. Verse 1 also says THE PEOPLES PLOT IN VAIN. The

coming together of the nations is the result of a strategy plan. The Hebrew word for “plot” is used in Psalm 1:2, where it is translated “meditates.” Note the contrast. The godly meditates on God’s law, but the ungodly plot in vain. The word “vain” refers to that which is empty, futile, and worthless. So the psalmist rightly asks, “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?”

Verses 2-3 give the answer: “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.” Verse 1 suggests that this worldwide conspiracy is a grassroots movement. But verse 2 tells us that this conspiracy actually reaches the highest offices of authority: “The kings of the earth set themselves together.” This is military terminology that speaks of taking a position in preparation for war. It is difficult for world leaders to agree on anything, least of which the decision to go to war. But the psalmist describes a global coalition of world leaders that has unanimously agreed to go to war. What enemy could be so threatening that a worldwide coalition would declare war? Verse 2 says, “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed.”

This global conspiracy is against the Lord God. But this opposition is not against the mere notion of God. The people and rulers of the world have no problem with a generic, ambiguous, non-distinct God – a glorified “Mr. Potato-Head” that can be designed at our discretion. The problem is with YAHWEH, the self-existent, self-sufficient, self-revealing God whose perfection, purpose, and power are represented on earth by his “Anointed.” The Hebrew word translated “anointed” is the Old Testament word for the Messiah. Its New Testament counterpart is Greek word translated “Christ.” In The Old Testament, the Lord anointed prophets, priests, and kings to consecrate, authorize, and empower them for service. In Psalm 2, the “anointed” is a king. In the psalmist’s mind, it may have been a Davidic king of Israel. However, the New Testament writers understood it to speak of Jesus Christ, our all-sufficient Prophet, Priest, and King. The worldwide conspiracy is against the Lord God and the Messiah-King, Jesus Christ.

Verse 3 records the mission statement of THE UNITED NATIONS AGAINST GOD: “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.” Human beings refuse to submit to divine authority, describing it as “bonds” and “cords.” They view divine authority as bondage, slavery, and oppression. The ultimate goal of sinful people is the break God’s bonds and cast away his cords. No wonder the psalmist asked, with amazement and incredulity, “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?” Human rebellion against divine authority is doomed to fail.

In the turbulent days of the French Revolution, revolutionaries stormed the Bastille in Paris, seeking to remove every vestige of law and order. One scaled the Cathedral of Notre Dame and tore down the cross from atop its spire, dashing it into pieces on the ground for everyone to see. Turning to a poor peasant, the rebel boasted, “We are going to pull down all that reminds you of God!” But someone from the crowd responded, “Citizen, then you might as well pull down the stars themselves!”

Human rebellion divine authority is futile. Think about it. Is a tree really free when the wind uproots it from its base of nourishment in the soil? Is a fish really free when the fishermen's hook reels it out of the confines of the water? Is a train really free when it derails and continues to travel outside of the direction of the tracks? And we are not really free when we rebel against the authority of God. True liberty is the result of joyful obedience to the perfect will of God. In Matthew 11:29-30, Jesus says, *"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* Galatians 5:1 says, *"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."* 1 John 5:3 says, *"For this is the love of God, that we keep commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome."* P.T. FORSYTHE was right: *"The first duty of every soul is to find not its freedom but its Master."* Human rebellion against the Almighty is futile. True freedom is only found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. THE RESPONSE OF THE SOVEREIGN

Psalm 2 reads like a Pulitzer Prize level investigative report by a diligent journalist. In the first stanza, the psalmist uncovers an international plot to overthrow the government of God. In the second stanza, the psalmist reports God's response to human rebellion. It is a twofold response.

A. GOD SITS.

Verse 4 says, "He who sits in the heavens laughs." Notice that contrast of moods between earth and heaven. While the nations are raging and the people are plotting and the kings are setting themselves and the rulers are taking counsel together, God sits in the heavens. The Lord is not placing the floor in anxiety. He does not go to his war room to receive an intelligence briefing. He need not flee to a secure location. The Lord sits. Where is he sitting? The Lord sits in the heavens. This does not mean the Lord is distant or aloof or uncaring. It means that the Lord is beyond the reach of human rebellion. Psalm 115:2 inquires, "Why should the nations say, 'Where is their God?'" Psalm 115:3 answers, "Our God is in the heavens, he does all that he pleases." The Lord sits in the heavens.

What is God doing as he sits in the heavens? The psalmist says, "He who sits in the heavens laughs." Human rebellion is divine comedy. God is amused by the pathetic attempts to impeach him. But this is not the laughter of hilarity, but of God's derision, mockery, and contempt. There is a severe aspect to the smile of God. When God laughs, it is not funny. God is not laughing with you; he is laughing at you. Verse 4b says: "the Lord holds them in derision." Why does God respond to the rebellion of man by laughing with derision? Psalm 37:12-13 answers, "The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes his teeth at him, but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he sees that his day is coming."

B. GOD SPEAKS.

GOD SPEAKS TO EXPRESS HIS ANGER. Verses 5, “Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury.” God is not just the God of love. God is also a God of wrath. A.W. TOZER said, “God’s wrath is His righteousness reacting against unrighteousness.” God’s righteousness demands that he take action against unrighteousness. Verse 5 says, “Then he will speak to them in his wrath.” This is poetry statement does not mean that God directly communicates with rebels. Rather, God speaks through his actions. It is cataclysmic wrath in which God works through the natural elements in response to human rebellion. When calamity strikes, it is not our place to play judge and jury. But with all of the cataclysmic events around us, someone needs to ask, “Is God trying to tell us something?” Even worse than speaking by actions, God also speaks by his inaction. It is called the wrath of abandonment. Romans 1 tells us that there are times when God steps back and says if you want to do things your own way, go ahead.

GOD SPEAKS TO AFFIRM HIS ANOINTED. In verse 6 the Lord says, “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.” Notice the tension of the text. The kings of the earth set themselves against the Lord and his anointed. God responds by saying, “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.” The kings of the earth cannot stop God’s sovereign agenda. God has chosen a king to rule the nations. He has set this king in Zion, his holy hill. This refers to both a specific location on earth and a transcendent place in heaven. This is God’s word to human rebellion: It’s too late! We got here too late and are going to leave too early to overthrow the government of Almighty God. God will have the last word. The Lord has set his King on Zion. The Son of God will reign over heaven and earth.

III. THE REIGN OF THE SON

Becoming Caesar of Rome in A.D. 350, FLAVIUS CLAUDIUS JULIANUS reinstated the pagan worship that had been abolished under Constantine. He viewed Christians as “powerful enemies of the gods,” and determined to rid the Empire of Christianity through persecution. On one occasion, Julian entertained friends by tormenting a believer name Agaton. With so many Christians being put to death,” the emperor asked, “How is your carpenter of Nazareth? Is he finding work these days?” Without hesitation Agaton replied, “He is perhaps taking time away from building mansions for the faithful to build a coffin for your Empire.”

So it is with every force that stands against the Lord Jesus Christ. This third stanza of Psalm 2 declares the affirmation and authority of Christ’s reign.

A. THE DIVINE AFFIRMATION OF CHRIST’S REIGN

In verse 7, the king speaks: “I will tell of the decree: the Lord said to me, You are my Son; today I have begotten you.” This verse is used several times in the New

Testament to affirm the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. First, it is a reference to the DEITY of Christ. Hebrews 1:5 says, "For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you'?" Likewise, it is a reference to the RESURRECTION of Christ. Acts 13:32-33 says, "And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to, us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you.'" The New Testament also teaches that this statement refers to the MAJESTY of Christ. Philippians 2:9-11 says, "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

**ALL HAIL THE POWER OF JESUS' NAME!
LET ANGELS PROSTRATE FALL
BRING FORTH THE ROYAL DIADEM
AND CROWN HIM LORD OF ALL!**

B. THE DIVINE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST'S REIGN

First of all, CHRIST RULES THE NATIONS. In verse 8, God the Father says to God the Son, "Ask for me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession." The Father is so pleased with the Son that he offers a great inheritance just for the asking. The Father gives his Son the nations as an inheritance – the same nations that rage divine authority. The Father further offers his Son the ends of the earth as his possession. This verse prophesies that the kingdom of Christ will ultimately extend to the very ends of the earth. This is the biblical motivation for world missions. In *Let the Nations Be Glad*, JOHN PIPER writes: "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exist because worship doesn't." It is the mission of the church to spread the glory of the name of Jesus to all the nations of the earth. In Matthew 28: 19, Jesus commands: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Likewise, CHRIST JUDGES THE NATIONS. Verse 9 says, "You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." This verse paints two beautiful pictures of Christ for those who trust in him. Christ is a good shepherd who watches over his sheep with a rod of iron. And Christ is a wise potter who takes worthless clay and makes works of art. But this is only for those who humbly accept his divine authority. Those who reject the authority of Christ will find him to be a chastening shepherd who breaks rebellion with a rod iron. They will find him to be an angry potter who breaks the rebellious like an unwanted vessel. This is a picture of the judgment to come upon those who reject the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is like gravity. If you got to the top of a tall building and jump off, you do not break gravity. You will break your neck! So it is with those who reject the authority of Christ.

IV. THE REQUIREMENTS OF SURRENDER

Ulysses S. Grant – the victorious general of the U.S. Civil War and our 18th President – had one of the great nicknames of all time. As the war came to an end, the Confederate general acknowledged defeated and sent a message to Grant for terms of surrender. Grant answered that there would be no terms except an unconditional and immediate surrender. President Lincoln later commented that Grant’s initials – U.S. – stood for “Unconditional Surrender.” The nickname stuck. Grant was actually more accommodating to the Confederates when the war ended. He forced them to give up their weapons, but he permitted their soldiers to return home without fear of retribution, which set a tone of healing after the war. But when the actual terms were discussed, Grant permitted no negotiations. He insisted on unconditional surrender.

This is the point of the final stanza of Psalm 2. God extends mercy to rebels. But the terms of peace are unconditional surrender. In verses 10-12, the speaker changes again. We are not sure who to credit these final verses to. But the message is clear. God requires all men to submit to the Lord Jesus Christ.

A. THE ADMONISHMENT TO THOSE WHO DO NOT SUBMIT TO CHRIST.

Verse 10 says, “Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned; O rulers of the earth.” This call to surrender is issued to the authorities that plan and lead the human rebellion. The kings are to be wise about the decisions they make concerned the Anointed. The rulers of the earth are warned about the consequences of the decisions they make. In Luke 14:31-32, Jesus taught that kings count the cost before they go to war. Wise kings make terms of peace when they know they have no hope of victory. This is the word of the Lord to all who have not bent the knee to Christ. Be wise. Don’t be foolish. Think carefully about the consequences of your choices. Count the cost. Don’t start a war you can’t win.

Verse 11 says, “Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.” There are two commands here. First, **SINNERS SHOULD CHANGE THEIR WAYS.** Verse 11 says, “Serve the Lord with fear.” We are all servants, even those with great wealth, status, and authority. The only difference among us is the master we serve. The sinner serves himself. He sows to his flesh. He lives for the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life. But to serve oneself is to have a fool for a master. It only leads to misery, judgment, and destruction. But there is another way. In Matthew 16:24, Jesus says, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” You should serve the Lord with fear, fully recognizing his sovereign authority over your life.

Likewise, **SINNERS SHOULD CHANGE THEIR ATTITUDES.** Verse 11 says, “Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.” This is a succinct, dynamic, and glorious description of true worship. We should rejoice in God. Psalm 100:4 says, “Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!” Yet we should rejoice with trembling. Our rejoicing should be more than the emotional response to the man-centered focus of worldly entertainment

masquerading as true worship. We are to rejoice with in God. Yet to know who God is should cause you to tremble at the thought of his holiness, justice and authority.

Verse 12a issues one final call to surrender: “Kiss the Son.” This is not a kiss of affection. It is a kiss of allegiance. It is not a romantic kiss. It is a kiss of humble submission and total surrender. When a vanquished ruler surrendered to a conquering monarch, he would vow his allegiance with a kiss on the cheek, hand, or feet. Note the urgency of this call to surrender: “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled.” We typically view Christ as meek and lowly. Too kind to confront sin. Too forbearing to get angry. Too loving to bring judgment. But this is a shortsighted view of Christ. The psalmist had a full-orbed view of Christ. He recognized Christ as the Lord of all who will tolerate no rivals. So he warns those who have not submitted to Christ to kiss the Son before it is too late.

B. THE ASSURANCE FOR THOSE WHO SUBMIT TO CHRIST.

Psalm 1 begins with a statement of divine blessing: “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked.” Psalm 2 ends with a statement of blessing: “Blessed are all who take refuge in him.” A refuge is a hiding place, a strong tower, or a place of security. It was an ancient panic room. This is a stark reminder that there will come a time when you need a place of refuge. That’s the bad news. The good news is that God is unfailing refuge for those who trust in him. And those who take refuge in him are blessed. This does not mean that if God is your refuge all of your troubles will magically come to an end. There will still be battles to fight. But while the enemy is attacking and the battle is raging, God will be with you. Psalm 46:1 says, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”

**I TRUST IN GOD WHEREVER I MAY BE,
UPON THE LAND OR ON THE ROLLING SEA,
FOR, COME WHAT MAY, FROM DAY TO DAY,
MY HEAVENLY FATHER WATCHES OVER ME.**