

Westgate Church

*Walking with God in the Meantime:
The Christian Life through the Lens of the Psalms*

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The Reign of the Son and the Blessing of God

Psalm 2

Last Sunday we began a new series through the first part of the book of Psalms: “Walking with God in the meantime: the Christian Life through the lens of the Psalms.” We talked about how this book is all about living out our faith in the midst of a fallen world, where things don’t work the way they’re supposed to. This world is broken. And it’s full of broken people, including God’s people. On the one hand, as God’s people we worship the one true Creator and sovereign King, who has made himself known to us by the Spirit in the face of Jesus Christ. And that is something worth celebrating—to know God and be known by God, to have forgiveness and life in his name. To be invited into his presence as his redeemed people. To be adopted into the King’s family, and commissioned as servants of his kingdom with the confidence that his reign will be established in all the earth. We have much to celebrate before God. And the book of Psalms guide us in much celebration and praise.

At the same time, everyday we are reminded in some measure that though God’s kingdom is here in part, it has not yet come in full. His will is not always done on earth as it is in heaven. There remains a sadness to this world, a sickness and sin. God is not yet finished with it—he’s not finished with us. The Psalms bear witness to this reality, too—the tension of living in a world where God has given us his promises, but the fulfillment is yet to come. And so we live in the meantime—between the promise of God’s righteous rule and deliverance, and its glorious realization. And in this meantime, a rebellion is brewing. Though our God is sovereign, his reign is constantly challenged. There is a war being waged over who should really be in charge, and thus, over who gets to decide what a good and blessed life really looks like. What we should desire and look for in a full and rewarding life. This war rages today all around us, and even within us. And it’s the subject of this morning’s passage, Psalm 2: the reign of the Son and the blessing of God.

Now if you were here last week you’ll remember that this same question was at the heart of Psalm chapter 1: where shall we find true and lasting blessing in the world? To which that psalm answered, it’s found in a life shaped by God’s transforming Word. “Blessed is the man who...delights in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night.” Take a look at the last verse of Psalm 2 (v. 12). Notice how it ends on the same note that Psalm 1 began—on the subject of blessing: “Blessed are all who take refuge in him.” Psalm 1 ascribed blessing to the one who delights in God’s Word; Psalm 2 ascribes blessing to the one who takes refuge in God’s Son. It’s this connection and others like it that have led many readers over the centuries to see these two psalms working together as an introduction to the whole book, giving us lenses not only for how to read the rest of the Psalms, but for how to approach our walk with God in a fallen world. So Psalm 2 adds its voice to Psalm 1 and the question of where to find true

blessing amid a fallen world, and it points us in no uncertain terms to the necessity of surrendering to God's Son.

But again, God's reign is not unchallenged. And this psalm walks us through the challenge to this reign in vv. 1-3, then give us a glimpse of God's response to that challenge, unfolded in two parts, vv. 4-6 and 7-9. And then finally it closes with our proper response to God's reign in vv. 10-12, and what's ultimately at stake in our submission to God's reign—whether we will find wrath or refuge?

So vv. 1-3: The Challenge to God's Reign, and the revolution brewing inside us all.

The Challenge to God's Reign, 2:1-3

On the one hand, these opening lines describe human history ever since the fall back in Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve took the serpent's word over God's word, and sought to put themselves on God's throne. Ever since that time, a revolution has been brewing—a challenge to God's claim of universal authority over all creation. The picture here is the nations of the world and all their leaders gathering together at a great summit and conspiring on just how they can knock God off his throne. The target of their conspiracy is identified in v. 2: against the LORD—Yahweh, the creator of the universe and covenant God of Israel—and against his anointed, his chosen king. The word *anointed* is used in the Old Testament to identify those who have been selected by God and consecrated for his service—sometimes a priest, most often a king—and that consecration is done by anointing them with oil. It's also the word that comes into English as “Messiah,” and through Greek as “Christ.” Same word, (anointed= messiah= Christ), three languages. In our passage (Psalm 2), it refers to the anointed king who sits on David's throne in Jerusalem (as we find out in v. 6). And so to rebel against God in heaven is to rebel against his king on earth.

The conspirators have identified their targets: the LORD in heaven and his king on earth, and in v. 3 we hear their battle cry: "Let us break their chains . . . and throw off their fetters!" “Freedom!” “Live free or die!” We're familiar with that battle cry around here. Only in Psalms we're not talking about the tyranny of the British crown, but the tyranny of the Divine crown. They see God's reign as oppressive, and want to knock him off his throne, presumably to replace him with themselves, because they think they would do a much better job of running the universe.

This is the story of human history. Every nation that has set itself up against God or God's people, ancient or modern. Every nation that has sought to fill the earth with its own glory at the expense of God's—which is, by the way, every nation, and every member of every nation. All are guilty of high treason against the king. As God's people, were generally not inclined to be so direct or so crass, but the same rebellion is brewing in each of our hearts. And it's exacerbated by the trouble we see and experience in this fallen world. If I were in charge, things wouldn't go wrong like that. I wouldn't have to face suffering or disappointment. If I had my way, the world would work differently. I wouldn't let people take advantage of me. I wouldn't have to wait in traffic—people would just move over so I could go, because it's far more important for me to get where I'm going than it is for them. If I were king, people would love me. They'd stop talking about me behind my back. They would recognize how important I am. They wouldn't make promises and then not keep them. And if they did, they would pay. If I were king, the boss

would finally realize I'm the best asset this company has. Friends would want my advice. The coach would want me on his team. My parents would listen to me, and let me do what I want to do—because I get it, and they obviously don't. If I were king, I wouldn't mess up like God does. My definition of blessing would stand, and everyone would be happier. And all of a sudden we're part of the conspiracy.

But vv. 1-3 do not only give us a picture of human history since the fall, they also give us God's perspective on our human rebellion. Look again at v. 1. It's asking a question: "Why do the nations conspire?" When you think about who you're going up against, it's pretty obvious that it's not a good idea. World vs. God, odds are not in our favor. It's like when you're watching your child do something that's clearly a bad idea, and they end up getting injured or in trouble, what's your response? "What were you thinking?!" Did it not cross your mind that when you tried to ramp your bike overtop a burning grill Evel Knievel-style that there was a good possibility of setting the yard on fire? (And no, thankfully that hasn't happened at our house...yet). You look at what they're trying and you know, there's no way this can end well. This is not a good idea. The second part of the verse makes this pretty clear—the peoples plot *in vain*. It's vanity. Their rebellion is foolish. Their plots are empty. They can't accomplish what they're trying to do, and they ought to have known better.

And it's this spirit of astonishment that they would even try that is expressed in vv. 4-6, and the assertion of God's reign.

The Assertion of God's Reign, vv. 4-6

If you ever wondered if God has a sense of humor, here you go. "The one enthroned in heaven laughs." He looks down at this swarming rebellion and laughs. "The Lord mocks them." He makes fun of them. It's an ironic twist on psalm chapter 1, where we were warned not to *sit* in the seat of mockers. In Psalm 1, the wicked are sitting in their seats, mocking God and his ways. Here God sits in his seat, mocking them. It's kind of a harsh picture. But it really is funny if think about it for a minute.

It's like watching a little ankle-biting miniature schnauzer run up and start barking at a great Dane as though it's gonna take it down. It's pretty funny to watch. Now, multiply that times infinity, and you get the picture. Were all the armies of the earth, led by every king, president, and prime minister, including every terrorist cell, brandishing every sword, every machine gun, every tank, every nuclear weapon, to gather together as one army against the Lord it would be funny to him. Goofy. "What were you thinking?!?"

At the same time, it's no joke. It may tickle his funny bone, but it also kindles his anger. It is no little thing to oppose God's reign and try to knock him off his throne. It's high treason. And so God speaks to the nations—to rebellious corners of our hearts—a word of terror, and this is what it is: "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill" (v. 6).

Think about that for a minute. God exercises his rightful and steadfast reign through the human king he has enthroned in Zion, Jerusalem. And the fact that God has set his king on that throne is word of terror. It's a vehicle of his holy anger. Why? Verses 7-9 develop this a bit, as we hear

from the king himself a description of God's reign and how it shows itself in the supremacy of God's Son.

The Description of God's Reign, vv. 7-9

Here, the King speaks. In v. 3 the nations spoke their battle cry of freedom. In v. 6, the LORD spoke a word of terror. Now the king speaks a word of authority, telling us what the LORD in heaven decreed as he installed this king on the throne and made him supreme—the central expression of his dominion over all the earth. He begins in v. 7 with a description of his relationship to God, the basis for his supremacy: “You are my son, today I have become your father” or “today I have begotten you.”

Now if we stop for just a moment, we have to ask ourselves, what other parts of Scripture does v. 7 remind you of? “You are my Son, today I have begotten you.” Certainly it takes us back to 2 Samuel 7 and God's promise to David to place on of his descendants on the throne forever: “I will be to him a father and he will be to me a son” (7:14). But we can't help but also hear in v. 7 verses like John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son...” Or the voice of God at Jesus' baptism in Matthew 3:17: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Or again at the transfiguration of Jesus in Matthew 17. Not to mention the fact that this verse is cited in reference to Jesus in Acts 13:33. Very interesting...

And take a look at what God promises this king—how v. 8 describes his reward: “Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.” This king, this son of God, will possess the very nations who have conspired to kick him off. They will be his inheritance and reward as God's chosen king. Universal dominion—that's the idea. And what is he asked to do with these nations? Verse 9: “You will rule them [or more literally, shepherd them] with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.” Now, there is a question in this verse about whether the king is being asked to *break* the nations with an iron rod (as some translations put it) or to *rule* or *shepherd* them. I think “shepherd” is correct, but we have to remember that part of the shepherd's role in Scripture is to judge. So, dashing them to pieces like pottery (there's an image for you...), that's what the shepherd is supposed to do with them. Think of Ezekiel 34, where God himself shepherds his people, seeking the lost and binding up the wounded, but also punishing the fat sheep who take advantage of the others. Jesus picks up this same imagery in Matthew 25, where he describes his role in the final judgment as separating the sheep from the goats. So this king's relationship to God is as his son, his reward is all the nations, and his responsibility is to shepherd them in judgment. But one question remains: who is he? Who is this king?

If you pick up most commentaries on the psalms, they will explain how this psalm was probably first used as in worship upon the installation of the Davidic King, whom God, at that point adopts as his son (a la 2 Samuel 7), and through whom he will execute his reign. “*Today* I have become your father.” And so the promises of vv. 8-9 were Israel's hope, a kind of rhetorical bravado as we look out on all the nations that threaten God's people Israel. And I think that is very possibly correct—that it at one point functioned that way. But we have to ask if that's all it is doing, or all it was intended to do. For no ancient Israelite king who sat on David's throne ever received the reward promised this king. And no king of Israel ever exercised the responsibilities given to this king in terms of shepherding the nations in judgment. And

remember that the word for anointed in v. 2 is the Hebrew for Messiah and the Greek for Christ—the very word used in both the Old and New Testaments to talk about the coming one who sit on David’s throne forever and make all things new. I think the New Testament writers were correct in seeing this psalm not only as a dream of what we hope God will do through his king, but as a prophecy of what he would do, and has now done through his eternal Son, Jesus Christ. Which is both good news and bad news, depending upon your relationship to the Son.

God has put his king of his throne, and this role is ultimately fulfilled through his eternal Son, Jesus. So how should we respond to the fact that God is reigning through his Son? Even in this meantime, he is on the throne. What posture should we take before him, especially considering the treason that lurks in each one of our hearts? Take a look at the psalmist’s word of wisdom in vv. 10-12 and our proper response to God’s reign.

The Proper Response to God’s Reign, vv. 10-12

He begins by addressing the very kings and rulers of v. 1:

Therefore, you kings, be wise;
 be warned, you rulers of the earth.
 Serve the LORD with fear
 and rejoice with trembling.
 Kiss the Son,
 lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way,
 for his wrath can flare up in a moment.
 Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (2:10-12)

These verses in many ways correct our misconceptions about God’s reign and the true nature of blessing. There’s no question that this is a strong warning against all who would linger in their treason. If you’re still trying to topple God off his throne, and you hear the report that his king has been established, and that he’s not going anywhere, then that report is indeed a word of terror. The good news of God’s kingdom is only good news if you’re not standing in opposition to him.

But it is good news. Isaiah 52:7 says, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’” The announcement that God reigns is good news to a people who recognize they need his reign. It’s not oppressive. It’s precisely what we need to walk with God and enjoy his blessing in the midst of a fallen world.

We need a king. We are not capable of running this world ourselves. We need a shepherd. We need someone who can guide us through this mess of life. We need someone who can sympathize with us in the midst of our trials. Someone who knows what it’s like to be taken advantage of, to have his ideas dismissed, his dreams crushed, what it’s like to be tempted in every way. We need someone who is greater than that temptation. Who can stand with us before the Father, representing us and offering his perfect life as a substitute for our life of rebellion. We need a king who can offer forgiveness and peace with God, having taken the death penalty of high treason upon himself, dying a real death with all the weight of hell on him, in our place. We need a shepherd who is stronger than death, and who is with us to protect us and

deliver us. We need a risen Savior who is able to sustain us by his Spirit, as he sits at the right hand of his Father, always living to make intercession for us. We need someone who will finish the work he started, who can see us through to the end of this meantime and the glory of God's new creation. We need someone who will be faithful in that day to judge the unyielding evil that this world commits against us, so that we can persevere against it in this meantime. We need Jesus as our King. As Revelation 7:17 describes: "For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." Jesus will be faithful to carry us through the sin and sorrow of this meantime to a glorious eternity with him.

A full and rewarding life, even in a fallen world, is a life surrendered to the Son of God. "Kiss the Son"—v. 12. Pay homage to the Son (as if to kiss his hand or his ring). Show you allegiance to him. Put your trust in him. Find your refuge in him. Surrender to God's Son. And v. 11 gives us a picture of what that surrender looks like: "serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling." Now, that sounds like an odd combination at first—fear and joy. But when we remember who God is and what our relationship to him is, it makes perfect sense. On the one hand, our God is the Almighty Creator, King, and Judge, who alone deserves our full allegiance and who has the right to punish those who oppose him. Yet he is at the same time our Father through our union with Jesus, his Son. We have been adopted into his family, we share in his inheritance, and we are bathed in his love. Fear and joy. Reverence and delight. That is the heart of true surrender.

So are you trusting in Jesus? And I'm not talking about what you might have done once upon a time to become a Christian. Are you trusting Jesus today? Do you believe he is sufficient to accomplish his purposes in your life and this world, or are you taking matters into your own hands, adding your own rules and standards, tweaking his definition of blessing and how to get it, because you think you can do a better job than God.

Surrender to Jesus. Trust Jesus. Treasure Jesus. He is enough. He is on his throne, right where we need him, and he will not be moved. So wrath remains for the rebellion. But blessed are all who take refuge in him.