

# Rebel, Ruin, Refuge

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[ 0 : 00 ] Father, we confess before you that... Father, I guess I'm sort of forcing us to confess before you that most of the time we think we know who we are and we sort of recognize ourselves.

But, Father, you know that many times we, in fact, don't really understand or recognize ourselves. And we ask, Lord, that your Holy Spirit would do a very gracious but powerful and gentle work in each one of our lives and in the life of our church as a whole, that your Holy Spirit would work in our lives, that you would bring this word deeply into our hearts and that you would bring the gospel deeply into our hearts so that we would see who we really are and that in seeing who we really are, we would call out to you and flee to you for refuge.

And we give you thanks and praise, Father, that when we find refuge in you, we start to become as you truly intended us to be and you fit us for heaven.

So we ask, Lord, that you would do this gentle but merciful and powerful work in our lives. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. Actually, it's sort of a very fitting analogy for the sermon, but this is very unbalanced and it's very, very disconcerting, which I'll try to ignore.

But it's probably just in the providence of God that it's here like this because it sort of fits with the sermon. As many of you know, or some of you know, I spend a lot of time in coffee shops and I work on my sermon and eventually get into different conversations with people about that where they find out I'm a pastor and they'll ask me questions about what it means to be a pastor.

[ 1 : 45 ] It's very common when I speak to people who are under 40 that they have never been to a church service, like in their entire life. The little tiny things they might know about churches is if they happen to watch a church, something in the movies or television that shows a bit of a church service, but they've never been and they don't really know what goes on.

So sometimes they'll ask me, like, what I do? What do we do on a Sunday morning? Like I always invite them to come or to watch online and maybe one of them are watching online today. And so one of the things sometimes I try to describe a sermon to them and I have to confess most of the time I flub it.

I don't do a good job. So it's after I've failed and I try to sort of recalibrate in my mind how to talk about it. And so sometimes what I say is I'll say something like this.

And I'd say a different thing if I'm talking to a devout Buddhist or a devout Jew or a devout Muslim. They have sort of different categories that I have to try to talk to.

But often what I'll try to say, if I have my wits about me, is I'll say something like, it might surprise you to know that we Christians agree with agnostics and skeptics about something very, very important.

[ 3 : 01 ] We're in 100% agreement with them. We're in 100% agreement with agnostics and skeptics that the idea that human beings, mere human beings, could somehow ascend up to a big transcendent God and somehow or another come up with terms and ideas and concepts that sort of fit or capture him, that that's sort of like a vain type of thing in terms of it's vain you think you're special, but vain because it's fruitless.

It can't possibly work. If God is this big transcendent God, there's just no way that we human beings could actually reach him, her, it, or whatever. And I said, we actually Christians, it's probably going to surprise you.

It usually does surprise them, actually. They don't expect me to say that we agree with agnostics and skeptics about that. But then I say, but the difference is, and I said, if you think about it for a second, it makes sense.

The difference is that we think that God has spoken to us. Like, if you think about it, if God is really that big and all-knowing, it's possible that he could speak to us.

He could pick the right words for us to know. And then I say, you know, some other time we can talk about why we believe that, but that's what Christians believe. So I said, if you think about it, it makes sense that when we gather together, that part of what we do when we gather together is actually take something that God has spoken to us and try to think about it and see how it applies to our lives.

[ 4 : 32 ] And often people say, oh, like, I mean, obviously they've never thought about it. They've never been to a church in their entire life. And they go, oh, I mean, that's sort of, you know, different. And so, you know, and then I'll say, but there's a bit of a problem.

And I said, part of the problem is, because they'll maybe say, well, I thought the Bible was written long ago. And I'll talk a little bit about how, if you think about it, that if God really is, if there really is a God, like the triune God, that's big and all-powerful and all-knowing, then it's possible for him to say words that could speak to every generation and every people group.

And I said, but then sometimes, in fact, I just recently had a bit of a conversation just a couple of weeks ago with somebody. I said, so part of the thing that we need to do, I said, is you sort of have to make a bit of a bridge.

And I said, you know, and it's not that surprising, because sometimes, you know, people say things, and we don't think it really applies to us.

And then later on, we realize it really does apply to us. And I said, so part of what I do, when you see me here trying to look up in this space, trying to, looking a bit confused, and all of that, I'm trying to think of how do I bridge, how do I get that piece of what God has said that might have been written a long time ago, and how do I get people who are sitting in Ottawa in 2022 to realize it's speaking to them?

[ 5 : 53 ] So, for instance, like if you put the, we're going to look at Psalm 2, you're going to see instantly what I mean as a perfect example, if we just look at Psalm 2, which is the psalm I'm looking at today, it's the beginning of a summer series, or sort of the, yes, in many ways, the beginning of a summer series, we're going to look at different psalms over the summer.

And if you turn to Psalm 2, here we're reading something that was written 3,000 years ago, give or take a couple of years, 3,000 years ago, and you listen to it, and here's how it begins. Verse 1, Why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot in vain?

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.

Like, look at verse 1 again, why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot in vain? So, if you think about it, just for a second, take off your holy hat, take off your holy clothes, and it just doesn't seem true.

Right? I mean, it just doesn't seem true. Or maybe you think of it, and you say, you know, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, that describes, that describes the MAGA Trump people.

[ 7 : 07 ] Or, depending on your other, you know, that describes all those people going out and demonstrating right now, you know, against Roe versus Wade. Yeah, that describes them. Like, and so maybe we look at it and think about how it describes them, but we don't look at it and think about how it describes us.

It seems like it's too big a gap. It doesn't seem like a realistic thing to say. Okay. Well, here's the thing. Now, I meant to have my service, my phone, my family brought me my phone just at the very start of the service, so I didn't have a chance to look it up, but it maybe is even better that I don't look it up.

There's a song that if I start to say the words to it, it is so well known to you that, in fact, if I started to sing the first verse, most of you could sing along with me even though the words aren't up on the screen.

And even though I didn't have my phone with me, if I had a whiteboard, I'd probably by myself be able to put down most of the lyrics to the song, but I'd be willing to bet \$100 that with none of us looking at our phones, we could put all of the lyrics of the song up on the whiteboard within about a minute or two, and we could do it effortlessly.

And it's a song which virtually every Canadian knows, and my guess is that almost every single one of you knows, and you know it very well. Imagine there's no heaven.

[ 8 : 34 ] It's easy if you try. No hell below us. Above us, only sky. Imagine, and it goes on. Am I not correct?

Imagine there's no heaven. It's easy if you could all join up with me in singing it, and we'd all be able to put it up on the screen. And here's the other thing about that song.

And I... It's not just that we know the lyrics to the song, but that most people, when they sing the song, have a deep emotional connection to that song.

In fact, in an odd way, there's almost something transcendent or religious about that song. It moves you.

It tugs at your heart. Imagine there's no heaven. It's easy if you try. No hell. No hell below us. Above us, only sky. It speaks to us at a very deep level.

[ 9 : 34 ] But that song is actually saying what verses 1 to 3 said in a modern singable form that tugs at your heart.

Why do the nations rage or plot and the peoples plot in vain? That's God's comment. We work together, but the bottom line is, verse 3, let us burst their bonds apart, that is the God, that is the Lord and is anointed, and cast away their cords from us.

Let us live. Let us live as if there is no God, there is no hell below us, there is no heaven up above, there is just us.

Let us live in that way. And when we sing or hear that song, it tugs at our heart, it speaks to us. In fact, that song shows that verses 1 to 3 of Psalm chapter 2 are deeply true.

Not only are they deeply true of most Canadians, it is deeply true of you and me. Because if we're honest, there's something in that song that tugs at our heart too.

[ 10 : 49 ] To cast, to live as if God does not exist, to cast off his bonds, to cast off his cords. Now one of the things about the Bible is that as I, I think I learned it from Jackie Hill Perry that the Bible is both a window and a mirror.

And it's a window in the sense that it opens up the door, the window to us to start to understand and see the world as it really is. And it's a mirror because it begins to reveal to us what we really look like and what we're really like at the level of the heart in the context of the living God.

And that's what this psalm does in a very, very powerful way. It's a psalm that, with this, with Psalm 1, which we're going to look at next week, it's the introduction to the Psalter.

It tells us how to enter into the Psalter. The Psalter is the book of Psalms and the book of Psalms are the songs that God wants us to sing. They're the prayers that God wants us to pray.

And at the same time they teach us and they inform us. And one of the reasons that we can see why this psalm is here right at the beginning is it teaches us that while we're trying to learn how to sing the songs that God wants his people to sing and to pray the prayers that God wants us to pray, there is a part of us that doesn't want God to exist.

[ 12 : 21 ] Pascal, who wrote a famous sort of collection of thoughts of apologetics, I think it was in the 17th century, but I can't remember if it was the 17th or the 18th century in France.

He has this very powerful thing where he says that if you want to talk about the Christian faith to people who are outside the Christian faith, you have to deal with two issues. One issue is that everybody has reasons, often very good reasons, why the Christian God cannot be true.

But the other thing, which most people don't recognize, is that most people don't want the triune God to exist. They don't want Christianity to be true. They will accept just about anything other than accept the Christian faith.

And Psalm 2 is expressing that to us as a way for us as we enter into worship and prayer is to acknowledge that there is part of us that likes to cast off God's bonds and his courts.

So how does God react? That we wouldn't want him to exist. All of verses 4 to 12 talk about it, but we'll look at it in chunks.

[ 13 : 26 ] Let's look at the first thing is going to be very surprising. And actually, many of us find it troubling and many of us probably find it offensive. Look at verse 4.

He who sits in the heavens laughs. One moment. So some of us don't want to recognize the fact that we have part of us that really the song imagined speaks to us at a deep level.

And others, of course, would be very, very public about, you know, I've seen people about saying how they're looking forward to going to hell because all the cool people and their best friends will be there. And people can be very sort of, you know, ha-ha about it.

And that's fine. But the surprising thing here is what the psalm reveals is that God laughs at this. But look, and it's a bit offensive. Look, again, verse 4, he who sits in the heavens laughs. The Lord holds them in derision. I mean, he just, he laughs like because it's ridiculous. Verse 5, then he will speak to them in his wrath.

[ 14 : 32 ] And that's a troubling idea for Canadians. And terrify them in his fury, saying, as for me, I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.

So it's interesting that this verse 4 to 6, it begins with a picture of heaven laughing and it ends up with God's response, not just as laughing, but there's also anger at what's going on by whether we human beings would live in this.

And his response is that he sends his king to the earth. It begins with something transcendent and it ends with something very, very much among us.

But we're bothered by some of this stuff. Well, in terms of, let's look at the thing about the laughing. We think this is sort of wrong for God, but it's something that we can actually deeply relate to.

Imagine for a moment between the two services the places may be empty.

And that's what it's like. We have a service at 8, very small little, very 1662, book of common prayer, the, thy, thou, dost language. And then there's a period of time when there's nobody here between the 9 and the 10 o'clock service.

[ 15 : 39 ] And let's say Barbara's gone. And I think I'm here all by myself. And I start to do my best imitation of U2's Bono singing interspersed with how, what's the guitarist's name?

Slash or something like that. How Slash plays his guitar. So I'm up here singing away, thinking I'm all by myself, playing the guitar, doing all the moves.

And all of a sudden I discover that the more needs have all come in very quietly and are watching me. They could turn off all the lights, the room would be a bright red from the color of my face.

Now they wouldn't all laugh at me because they're very nice, but imagine it was somebody else.

And they would just think I'm completely and utterly ridiculous. Here I am, a man of a certain age, acting as if I'm a super rock star and it's just ridiculous and you would laugh and you all understand it.

Well, that's, now you understand a little bit about your pretension and mine that I don't need God, I don't need a creator, I don't need a sustainer, I don't need oxygen.

[ 16 : 46 ] Whoa, whoa, whoa, that's wrong. Yes, you do. I don't need gravity. I'm just the God of the universe. No, no wonder God laughs.

And what about the anger? I was talking to somebody about this just about a month or so ago and I said, imagine, I said that you had had some kids and they're your kids and so, you know, you changed their diapers when they were young, you, you know, you cared for them, you got them to school, you gave them sporting events, you gave them allowance and then for whatever reason you're very wealthy and you just continue to give them money and they don't work and you put them up in a very, very fine house and they get all the money they want every time they go to their bank account the money's there that they need and they live in a house and every single thing is coming from you and you are completely and utterly supporting them and then you discover that what they do is they go around telling people how bad and evil and how much you suck and how they're responsible for all this money, they're making it, they're sustaining it and you might be very angry at them.

In fact, if you would be like most people, if you hear how much they're disparaging you and saying how they, you know, they're an orphan and that you're dead, they don't even have a dad, like you might just say, well, I've had enough of them, I'm going to cut them off, you'd be angry at them.

So God's response to human beings thinking that we can be our own gods is actually very, that makes, like that's not an outrageous thing for God to do. But it isn't just that he laughs and it isn't just that he's angry, there's something deeper that's going on here.

Now, just before I read the next bit, and if you have your Bibles you can already see it, but if you're just looking up on the screen you have to wait. You know what I tell my Jewish friends is, you know, we Christians accept what you call the Tanakh and we call it the Old Testament and we accept that that's God speaking.

[ 18 : 44 ] but we obviously, we believe that because of Jesus and his coming, because he is the Messiah, the anointed one, that there's also now more words that God has spoken to us and we call that the New Testament.

And you might or might not know this, but what we call the New Testament quotes parts of the Old Testament or makes allusions to it. And the Bible text in the Old Testament that's most quoted in the New Testament is Psalm 110.

It is found directly quoted or alluded to far more than any other text in the Old Testament. And the second most quoted text in the New Testament from the Old Testament is Psalm 2.

Well, look at these next few verses and you'll understand why. Look at verse 7. So this is the king, right? As for me, I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill. And the king is now saying, I will tell of the decree.

The Lord said to me, you are my son. Today I have begotten you. Ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession.

[ 19 : 51 ] You will break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Now you can, those of you who are Christians, you can see that Jesus quotes that directly.

It's part of the text in the New Testament to use about the divinity of Jesus. A riddle, a puzzle which is there in the Old Testament that only Jesus actually answers.

But we're very bothered by this idea that the coming of God and of his Messiah to earth would lead to things being smashed. But here's a way to see it.

In fact, actually, I've sort of jumped ahead a little bit in terms of the overall sermon. The sermon, the big idea of the sermon is that human rebellion against the triune God will only have one of two ends. Ruin, you are ruined, or you seeking refuge in him. You are ruined, or you realizing that you're heading to ruin, you seeking refuge in him.

[ 21 : 01 ] So imagine for a second you don't like the law of gravity. You hate the law of gravity. You find the law of gravity deeply offensive. You think it shouldn't be there. You think that by your power of your mind that it should not be there.

You should be able to fly. You should be able to soar. You should be able to be like a god. And you can say that as you step off of a 12-story building. And you can shake your fist at gravity all the way down.

You can scream at gravity. You can curse gravity. You can pretend you're flying. But you are falling. And you will end dead on the ground. The fact of the matter is that if in fact the triune god does exist and because every human being will die coming face to face with the triune god is an unavoidable reality.

And you will either crash against that triune god in fact actually if up until now up until the end of verse 9 all you can see is the only option is smashing.

That you have your pretensions about God not existing and whether or not that's very conscious or whether or not it's something unconscious that you never recognize others might see in you or at times you start to realize that you don't you know like this is my body you know my body myself good grief I mean my body myself and if the psalm was just to end at verse 9 it would present a very bleak and despairing view of the human project that all we human beings can do is to rebel against God whether conscious or not wish that he wasn't there and at the end of the day really all we are is people falling from a 12 story building railing against gravity and we lose gravity wins and we will be ruined but the psalm doesn't end at verse 9 it has one more section one more trio of verses let's look at what they are now therefore verse 10 oh kings be wise oh there's a possibility of wisdom be warned oh rulers of the earth serve the lord with fear and rejoice with trembling kiss the sun lest he be angry and you perish in the way for his wrath is quickly kindled and what's the final word blessed are all who take refuge in him what is the final word before you start to read the rest of the psalter is blessed are all who take refuge in him now one of the things that the rest of the psalter you know many of us and this is where that song imagine is so powerful right imagine there's no heaven it's easy if you try no hell below us above us only sky and you go on and on and on imagine all the people and you know all of this etc etc and the idea of serving the lord with fear and rejoicing with trembling is deeply offensive that's not what we want to hear and one of the things that the rest of the psalter will make clear to us is that human beings don't have a choice about serving and the other word for serving is worshipping that the fact of the matter is is that I don't have a choice between serving the triune god and not the choice between me is that I'm going to serve somebody or something

[ 24 : 44 ] I can't help but serve something or somebody and I might be serving my ego I might be serving my career I might be serving art I might be serving money I might be serving my politics I might be serving a certain type of ideology I might be serving technology or science or whatever I

might be serving my wife or living in complete and utter terror about what my kids or my neighbors say and I am serving something so the question isn't will I serve or not is what are you in fact serving and the rest of the Psalter will start to make that very clear as you read through it and as you pray through it and as you sing through it and this particular thing of kiss the sun one of the things here which the psalm is remembering and one of the problems I have sometimes when I'm talking to people about the Christian faith is I realize I can start to talk about the Christian faith as if it's just ideas if it's just principles it's just certain things about how culture or morality or philosophical types of ideas but it's not it's about a person

I mean it is about those things there are ideas there are concepts and precepts and practices and processes and that matter but at the end of the day it's a person and this word kiss the sun it's an image of homage of acknowledging your sovereign lord to whom it is proper for you to serve and bring glory and to listen to and to follow and it's an intimate image I had some people who were from a French background who were at the earlier service and I shared with them and I said in a French culture you don't just sort of say you know like this or shake your hand it's the the kiss on either side it's close it's personal you're in their space it's a sign of the fact that you're willing to be completely and utterly defenseless and close and that's the image the psalms when they're prayed and as they're sung and as they're reflected on it's not just ideas there's a king who creates a kingdom and his kingdom is all centered around him and it's it's relating to him it's not a kingdom where you just sort of do things as if the king is gone that's the beginning of the psalm casting his bonds asunder there's always a king that we are to be close to and intimate with and that we are to pay homage to and when it says that his wrath in verse 12 is quick that we might get we experience his anger that we might perish and that's the thing about the ruin and then his wrath is quickly kindled the image there isn't that God is very very thin skinned can fly into a rage in a moment the issue is this that in the next 30 seconds

I could have an aneurysm and to your shock collapse dead that we don't know when we will appear before God face to face we might think we know I might think you know I'm having to plan eventually for my retirement and all and you know I think I'll plan a retirement plan until I'm 95 and all of that type of stuff but I don't know I don't know if I'm going to die on my way home I don't know part of the thing that gets people like if you in Acts chapter 5 there's this sort of scary story of a man by the name of Ananias and Sapphira who dropped dead and it's a whole other topic for another sermon but one of the things that commentators and all try to do is try to make it look like what what Ananias and Sapphira did was so unbelievably terribly wrong that God had to kill them but that is not the point of the story the fact of the matter is is that it was a garden variety type of bad thing just garden variety the simple little white lie that you or I take or make and we never even give it a second's thought and the point of the story is you never know when you're going to appear before the living God you just don't it can spring up in a moment and you're there

I'm driving along thinking how I'm going to do this I'm going to do that I'm so great I'm do this and the next thing I know I'm before the living God I'm before him all of a sudden in the blink of an eye in the twinkle of an eye but notice how the psalm ends right now George if you are outside of Christ you are a man who stepped off of the tallest building in the world and you are falling and you might think you're God you might think you're flying you might shake your fist at the true and living God but the fact of the matter is is that you only have one destiny and that is to land in the ground but the psalm said there is another option why did God send his son his anointed one to his anointed to his Zion hill the hill where he died why did he send his only begotten son why did he send our king and he sent his king that he might drink the cup that you deserve he sent his son and his king that you and I might find refuge in him you and I by simple act of faith might find our refuge in him just as I sort of bring the sermon to a close what if you think back to verse 2 let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us what is it you discover when you come to the Lord for refuge what are those cruel and irksome terrible bonds and cords that the Lord has for you and me truth the Lord wants to bind us with truth what do I want in the vanity of my imaginations

I want lies he wants to bind me with the truth he wants to bind me with love when I want to hate he wants to bind me with goodness when I would rather do things which are purely and utterly pursuing my ego he wants to bind me with beauty when I want to choose ugliness ugliness from my lips or ugliness in my mind or in my imagination he wants to bind me with beauty he wants to bind me with justice when I would rather have injustice he wants to bind me with mercy when I would rather show no mercy he wants to bind me with the gift of forgiveness, when I would rather show no

forgiveness but show resentment.

[ 31 : 52 ] Those are the terrible, terrible, terrible, atrocious things that the living, true and living God wants to bind you and me with. Those are the cords we want to cast away.

And the Lord looks at you and me and says, gosh, George, you need to find refuge in me, the way, the truth, and the life, the true, the good, the beautiful. I who am just yet merciful, whose goodness is beauty and whose beauty is goodness. And we need that. We don't need to have those cast aside. I need those to bind me. And you know the wonderful thing? I was sharing this with somebody. We got on a bit of a sidetrack. This is a non-Christian. This is a couple of months ago. And I said, you know, one of the wonderful things about the Bible and things like this is if you think about it for a second, all the Bible says is you shall not tell a lie.

And my implication is it tells you you should tell the truth. But you think about it for a second. You can sing. You can write poetry. You can write a novel. You can write laws.

Just don't tell lies. Just don't tell lies. Like it's not free. It's not like it's so binding me as if I can only say one thing, you know, quack, quack, quack, quack. No, the whole universe is open. Write about economics. Write about statistics. Write beautiful songs and sing them. Just don't tell lies. Speak the truth. It doesn't tell you how to love.

Love your children one way. Love your husband or your wife another way. Love your neighbor another way. Love the barista who's serving you another way. It doesn't tell you how to.

[ 33 : 44 ] You see what I mean? It's like these things aren't things which bind us. And that's the thing which the Psalms are going to now unfold. That now that you realize, okay, I have a sin problem.

There's something in me. There's some significant part of me that's always going to be rebelling against God. That my refuge in him is a work of his grace, not of my accomplishment. And now the Psalm is going to help me to sing out of finding refuge in him and wanting to have deeper refuge in him and understanding how these chords and bonds that his word provides are completely trustworthy.

And do not destroy me, but make me more fully myself and make me free and whole. We are all on one level. Fundamentally, we know that we are more ourselves in truth than in lie, more ourselves in goodness than in evil, more ourselves in beauty than in ugliness, more in ourselves in justice rather than injustice, more ourselves in mercy rather than in hatred.

And that is what the Lord calls you and me to invite you to stand. Let's bow our heads in prayer.

And just before I pray, if you're here or if you're watching online, if you either maybe you're not sure where you are with the trying God, but after hearing this, you realize there's been a tug in your heart that you don't want to have imagined tug on your heart, that you'd rather have the true and living God tug on your heart, that you'd rather not want to cast off his bonds, but you want to find refuge in him so that the bonds of truth and love and goodness and mercy and beauty and justice are the bonds that begin to actually keep you together and whole.

There is no better time than right now to just call out to the true and living God and say, Jesus, please be my Savior and Lord, and I want to find my refuge in you and never let me go.

[ 35 : 45 ] And there's no better time than now just to call out to him and say that. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, we thank you that your word makes clear who we are.

And we ask, Lord, that you create within us a hunger for you, a hunger for Jesus, that the message of the gospel and of your mercy, that it humble us, that it helps us to die to our pride and vain glory. We give you thanks and praise that you want us to find refuge in you, that you are our refuge, and that when we find our refuge in you through your grace, that, well, Father, that from the perspective of your grace, as we hear your words, we begin to understand that you just want us to be bound. You want to bind us with truth. You want to bind us with love. You want to bind us with joy. You want to bind us with peace and mercy and justice and beauty. And so, Lord, we ask that you create not only a hunger and longing and yearning for you, but a hunger and longing and yearning for your word, hunger and longing and yearning to know the psalms and have the psalms form us, to guide us in our prayer and the singing of our praises.

We ask, Lord, that your word have a deep hole and root in our lives. And we ask all of these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.