

# Finding true freedom

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     who has the power? It's an important question, isn't it? I don't mean whether your electricity works or not. I mean power in the sense of authority, power, the ability to make your wishes become reality. Sometimes power is obvious and sometimes power is more subtle, but in any given situation, it's an important question to ask. Who has the power here?

Sometimes there's one person who theoretically should have the power, but in fact they do not. Sometimes somebody thinks they have the power, but actually they don't. When you go into a new situation, it's well worth knowing who has the power here. It's important at school, it's important when you start a new job, it's important in whatever different clubs and societies and committees we might be serving on, and it's important on a global scale. Who has the power?

power. Which nations have power on our world stage? Which of the nations can make their desires a reality? Who can get the best trade deals? Who can exact tribute from their neighbors?

And who must kowtow to the wishes of another? And it's that global stage, that international perspective that we turn to this morning as we look at Psalm 2 together. Like the first psalm that we looked at a couple of weeks ago, Psalm 2 is likely chosen very carefully and deliberately to sit here at the head of the psalter, and the two are designed to work together. The very first word of Psalm 1 is blessed. Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked, and it is to that blessing that we return at the very end of Psalm 2. These bookends kind of hold together these two introductory psalms to give these starting thoughts as we dive in to the book of Psalms. So if Psalm 1 deals with the most urgent individual matter, you must know where you are going, and you must be sure you belong to the congregation of the righteous. If that's Psalm 1, well, Psalm 2 takes a different tack. Psalm 2 says you must know where history is going. You must see the whole show.

You must understand that the world has been promised to the Messiah. These questions of where the power lies, these questions of where we are headed as individuals, these are big questions. They matter to us individually. They matter to us on a national scale, and perhaps even more for us as a nation.

[ 2 : 2 6 ]     In many ways, these things matter to us as the church. When the church around the world seems to be under threat, when the nations rage, when states demolish church buildings and arrest her leaders, how do we react? Where does the power reside in these situations? The message of Psalm 2 is clear.

The power and the authority lies ultimately with God and with his anointed royal messianic son. So let's dive into this psalm and see what it has to say. And the first thing we find as we come into Psalm 2, the first thing we find is rebellion. The world rejects God's authority.

The nations do not like that God has the power. And so they rage and they plot against him. They conspire. The picture here is of the kings, the ambassadors of the nations, their representatives kind of pictured at a conference and whispering in the corners and plotting and conspiring and feeling one another out. Who could be relied upon to join our rebellion against the overall authority?

These nations do not like that somebody else has authority over them and they are planning to get rid of him. Now this is a scenario that has played out countless times over the ages. It has played out from the international stage through to the corporate boardrooms through to teenagers at home.

Human beings rebel against authority. We try to do away with any power above us, don't we? In verse 3, from the perspective of these rulers of the nations, they believe they have been shackled, that they are enchained by God. It's the bonds of the Lord and of his anointed that they want to cast off.

[ 4 : 15 ] And again, this is so often the way, isn't it? Our society sees God as an oppressor, as that cosmic killjoy. We were thinking a bit about this last week when we saw Hitchens' view of God as kind of starling in the sky, the omnipresent watcher, checking up on you, wanting to catch you out and stomp down on you. And we're constantly bombarded with this kind of rebellious attitude. The idea that true happiness comes through freedom, by which we mean, when we say freedom, we mean material acquisition without limit, doing whatever we please in the moment, gathering as much stuff as we can find, having sex with whoever we want. It is my life and I will do as I please. In many ways, we are like little children, aren't we? Believing that being a grown-up means being able to eat as many sweets as you want and stay up as late as you like and watch whatever you please on TV with nobody to tell you what to do.

Children don't understand the negative consequences of those things. And so often we as adults are not actually any better. So often we lack the capacity to see that what looks like freedom, what feels like freedom is actually anything but. We think we are shaking off our oppressors and tearing off the chains and crying freedom in the face of those who tell us no. That's how it feels so often, isn't it?

And it's been this way forever. We see this all around us today. David saw it in his day and wrote it in this psalm and it wasn't new then. Since the very first days of human existence, since Adam and Eve in the garden chose to declare their independence from God, they elected to throw off what seemed to them to be shackles and chose to do things their own way. And since that day, humankind has been in rebellion against the king of heaven. Every unconverted person is naturally inclined to say no to God.

Every unconverted person. And of course it's a temptation that we're not free from either, is it? Even of those of us who wish to say yes to God, even as those who have chosen to trust him and to seek to follow him, even we still know that if we're honest, so often we don't like the way that his laws feel like a restriction to us. So often God's regulations aren't sweet as honey, are they?

They feel like an oppressive burden that stop us from behaving the way we wish. Sometimes the rage that the nations express in verse 1, sometimes that rage is visible in its full fury.

[ 7 : 10 ] Sometimes we see the vehement atheists kind of loudly proclaiming their rage. Those who will vent their spleen against the God who they say they don't believe exists.

But even when it is quieter, even when the conspiracy is more secret and the plotting is in the corners, it's still true that this world hates God, detests his Messiah, and despises the Messiah's people.

When the world rages against Christians, it's the overflow of this hatred, isn't it? When the Chinese government knocks down the churches, it's this hatred boiling over.

When Islamist militants beheaded 21 Christian men in February 2015, they were raging against the king and against his anointed. And that's what Jesus told us to expect.

John 15 verse 18, if the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belong to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I've chosen you out of the world, and that is why the world hates you.

[ 8 : 22 ] And so, says Charles Spurgeon, we have in these first three verses a description of the hatred of human nature against the Christ of God.

That's what we're looking at here in the start of this psalm. This is how much the world hates God and Jesus and you and me. So, there is the rebellion in the first three verses.

And as we continue into the rest of the psalm, we encounter the rule. God has the power and the authority. The psalm is very clear, isn't it, that that power is absolute.

The picture in verse 4 is of God laughing in derision at the folly of the nations. It is utterly ludicrous that they would plot against him. Their supposed conspiracy is even less significant to him than that fly buzzing around the room is to you and to me.

You know it's there, but really, who cares at all? It's gone, in fact, beyond irrelevance into the realm of comedy. Like the tiny child trying to beat up their parent, there's something bizarre and comical in the tiny ineffectual fists.

[ 9 : 35 ] It's not quite how cute, but the fact is there is absolutely no threat whatsoever. That much is perfectly clear here in the psalm. Why? Because God is the one who sits enthroned in the heavens.

He has the absolute power. He has all the authority. As the maker of heaven and earth, as the one who actively sustains the universe moment by moment, what possible power and authority could trouble him?

What coalition of nations can hope to be a threat to him? The why with which the psalm begins isn't really a question, is it? It's not a request for information.

Why do the peoples rage and plot in vain? It's not that, is it? No, it's an expression of astonishment. Why are the nations so foolish as to think that there is merit in their plotting?

What on earth are you playing at, you idiots? Can they really not see that their resistance is futile? Is it not readily apparent that God is in control?

[ 10 : 37 ] Why do the nations not accept the inevitable? God has the power. And when we look at the picture of that power in verse 4, when we see there this laughing God, we have to recognize that perhaps in that there's something that is not a very attractive picture to any people today.

We often don't think well of the one who laughs in derision, do we? But the other side of that that we have to see is that to the person on the inside, the absolute power of God is a reassurance, not a threat.

To the one who is being defended by God, the fact that he has the ability to laugh off any supposed threat is a good thing, isn't it? You see, God is not that Stalin in the sky that Hitchens rages against.

But he's also not Santa Claus in the sky either, is he? He's not some kind of cosmic pushover. Too many churches proclaim a God who would never rebuke, who would never express anger.

But that God is not the God of Psalm 2. The God of Psalm 2 says you can line up your tanks. You can arrange all the nuclear bombs you like. You can rage against the chains.

[ 12 : 02 ] But God is under no threat. God laughs at your puny efforts. And more than that, verse 5, he is angry. When God's proper place is not recognized, he is angry.

When God's laws are not obeyed, he is angry. When his benevolent, fatherly rule is treated as if it's an oppressive burden, he is angry about that.

And so God responds by installing his king. David proclaims in verse 7 what God said to him, and what is proclaimed of the king here in these verses was only ever partially true of David and his descendants.

This king pictured here who is God's own son. This king who is the anointed. This psalm speaks far more of the one who was yet to come than it does of David himself or any of the kings that followed on after him.

It is only of King Jesus that it is true that all the nations are his inheritance and the ends of the earth are his possession. Hebrews 1 shows us that it was not to any earthly figure.

[ 13 : 12 ] It was not even to the angels that God said, you are my son. Today I have become your father. It was not to them, but to Jesus Christ at his baptism and at his transfiguration that God spoke these words.

And therefore, as God himself possesses power and authority, so this king whom he has installed possesses power and authority. And verse 9 again is not a comfortable picture.

You will break them with a rod of iron. You will dash them to pieces like pottery. We don't like the idea, perhaps, of one who rules with the force of a rod of iron, who dashes his enemies to pieces as easily as the defective pot from the kiln.

This word translated rod here, it also has the meaning of scepter. And that's worth noting because a scepter is a mark of authority. It is not just an instrument of violence.

So God's king is not here a barbarian wandering around with a club, but rather is the duly appointed, righteously reigning king. God's chosen king is not a brutal dictator.

[ 14 : 28 ] He has the real authority. And once again, this power is a reassurance to God's people as much as or if even more than it is a warning to others.

I remember learning in, I think it was GCSE history, I remember learning about the League of Nations that was set up in the aftermath of World War I. And the League of Nations was ultimately completely ineffective in its aims of promoting world peace and preventing war, as evidenced by the fact that we now call it World War I, not the Great War.

The League of Nations did not succeed. And I'm sure the reasons for that are complicated. But the overall impression that I came away from those lessons with was the League of Nations failed because it was toothless.

It had no actual authority or certainly no actual power. Without troops, imposing economic sanctions was largely ineffective. And so when Italy invaded Abyssinia, nothing happened.

The League was powerless. An inability to enforce one's rule is profoundly problematic. But the God of the Bible is not some toothless old lion.

[ 15 : 47 ] His chosen king installed on Zion has a rod of iron to impose his will. And that means, yes, he will punish and ultimately destroy the guilty. But in that punishment, in that destruction, thereby he protects and vindicates and redeems those who are his own.

The kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ does not come because the world recognizes his reign and welcomes him in and kind of evolves into the kingdom of God.

That is not the picture the Bible paints for us. That is not how the kingdom comes. It comes because Christ imposes his reign by force on a rebellious people.

When Psalm 46 speaks of God breaking the bow and shattering the spear, it's not a gentle image, is it? That isn't kind of everybody voluntarily deciding, oh, we don't need these weapons anymore.

No, God is the conquering king who comes and forcibly disarms those who once stood opposed to him so that they cannot be a threat anymore, not that they ever were.

[ 17 : 03 ] So there is the raging rebellion in those first three verses. And there is the righteous rule in the middle. That's what's left. As we come to these closing verses, I guess maybe you're expecting a rebuke.

Maybe we'll close on a note of triumph as the king conquers. And there's a clear call for submission in these verses, isn't there? There's a warning. The kings and the rulers are called to turn away from their plotting, from their vain conspiracy, and called instead to walk in the way of wisdom.

These kings are in very real danger. Verse 12 tells us the sun's anger can flare up quickly, and if that happens, destruction will be the result.

This is not a matter for kidding around. This is a terrifying reality. In the hands of a king who has the power of life and death, looking at a king who knows you have been plotting his downfall, before the mighty one whose power you have rebelled against, what are you going to do?

In that situation, there is only one possible solution. There is only one conceivable hope. Kiss the sun. Serve the Lord with fear and celebrate his rule with trembling.

[ 18 : 29 ] Recognize that in the face of that overwhelming power, submission is the only course of wisdom. It is folly to stand in any sort of opposition to that kind of a God.

The call to kiss the sun. It's a call to stop fighting. In fact, it's a call to unconditional surrender. This is not a kiss of affection. There's a good chance that the kiss we're talking about here is not on the lips, not on the cheek, not even on the hand, but a kiss on the feet.

When the Near Eastern kings report the subjugation and the homage of the conquered king, that's what they say. So and so, king of wherever it was, he came and he kissed my feet.

He has been conquered. He serves me. And that is the call that God makes to these ancient sovereigns. Bow in homage.

Surrender your crown. Become vassals of the one true king. That was the call to the kings of the nations back in David's day. That was the call to these nations around David as he served as the king of Israel.

[ 19 : 42 ] That is the call to the nations today. Stop raging against God. Bow in homage. Stop trying to destroy his people. Recognize his authority. It is the call to the nations around us today.

And it is also the call to you and to me today. It is the call to us who claim that... Sorry.

The sentence did not make sense to me as I looked at it there. But it does make sense. We who claim to be king only in our own lives, we face that same call to submit.

I might not claim to be king of this nation, but I claim the right to be king in my own life a lot of the time. And the call to me is the same. Lay down your crown.

Submit. Bow in total homage to the one true king. Friends, so many of us like that image of Jesus meek and mild.

[ 20 : 48 ] The comfortable little baby in the manger. And so many of us like the idea of the God who offers salvation, who offers redemption. We like that God.

But then rebel at the idea of Jesus as Lord. Friends, God demands our complete and our total obedience to his law.

He demands that we stop trying to live our own way and that we follow his laws instead. His requirement is that we cease our rebellion lest his anger flare up. It's not a comfortable picture, is it?

It's not cozy. But we have to see also that there is real hope in these verses.

You see, we saw in those first three verses the rebellion and the rule in the central six. But my title for these final three verses is not rebuke, but rather refuge.

[ 21 : 57 ] In the closing section of this psalm, we see an offer of refuge. Notice in verse 10, these verses are addressed to the kings themselves.

These verses are not primarily a reassurance to God's people that they will be protected from their enemies. Though as we've seen, the psalm does function in that capacity.

But that's not the focus here at the end. Here in these last few verses, the call to the kings is come in. Yes, they must surrender their crowns. Yes, they must submit to the Lord as God and serve him.

Yes, he expects their total obedience. But it is still an invitation. There's a promise here. For those who kiss him, he will not be angry.

He will not leave them on the path of destruction. His anger will not flare up. And if they will only submit, then what they will find is that those who take refuge in him are blessed.

[ 22 : 57 ] These verses are an invitation, not an ultimatum. In these closing lines, what we see is grace.

We see an offer of hope. We see an invitation to find real hope and true freedom in Jesus Christ, God's anointed son. God says to the nations, God says to you and to me, he says, no.

He says, no, you cannot have the freedom you desire. You cannot have freedom to do as you please without consequences. You cannot have freedom to rape and kill and accumulate as many possessions as you like.

You are not free to advance yourself at the cost of others. You do not have liberty to ignore your sovereign. You are not welcome to set yourself up as judge and jury and executioner.

You are not king of your own life. God says, no, you cannot have that kind of freedom. But he offers in place of that supposed freedom, he offers in its place true freedom.

[ 24 : 10 ] In a marriage, perhaps for some people the bonds of commitment, that curtailment of freedom, if you like, from one point of view, whilst for some that may represent a ball and chain, for another, that same reality is the boundless freedom of love.

Is there not true freedom to be found in knowing that you love one another, knowing that you are committed to each other without ifs and buts and qualifications?

There is true freedom there. Well, so it is with God. The nations may rage against his stretches, but it is within them that we find true freedom and true happiness and real blessing.

Jesus said, I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. Friends, that is God's invitation to you today. Give up your rebellion, recognize the ruler, and find true refuge.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we are sorry that too often we join with the nations in their rebellion against you.

[ 25 : 42 ] Too often in our lives day by day, we do not live with you as our sovereign. we do not bow in homage before you. Too often we are willing to conspire and plot even though it be in vain.

Our Father God, we recognize you afresh this morning as the one true sovereign, as the one who has the right to rule not only in our own lives but in the whole earth.

love. And so Lord, we thank you for that offer of true freedom. We thank you for that promise of refuge in you.

We thank you that in you we find true freedom. We find salvation from the folly of our own desires.

we find salvation from your anger at our rebellion as we come to you and we kiss the sun. Lord, thank you for that promise that he is therefore no longer angry with us.

[ 26 : 52 ] That we are now ransomed, redeemed, and restored. And we can come and be in your presence as blessed children.

Thank you Lord. Amen. Amen. Amen.