

Psalm 2

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Preacher: Rob Patterson

[0 : 00] Psalm 2. Psalm 2.

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We're taking a bit of a change in our sermon series. We've finished the series on Philippians. What an encouraging series that was to start the year off. For the holidays though, for the rest of the year, what we'll be doing is preaching on a small series of psalms.

And this particular holiday is obviously the Easter holidays. So we're going to look at Messianic Psalms, which is why we're starting with Psalm 2, the first Messianic Psalm in the Psalter. And so there'll be myself and Dave, while David actually has some holiday during this period.

All right. So as you've actually heard Psalm 2 read out, and probably as you have it open in front of you, you've probably realized that there's a little bit of a gear change from the encouraging words of Philippians to where we're going to now in Psalm 2.

[2 : 18] Psalm 2 is quite confronting. When you look at these two categories that Catherine used, I think it's fair to say that if you look at the New Testament or you look at the Bible as a whole, you get to see them and how they interplay with each other.

But in Psalm 2, it's a little bit less clear. It seems far more balanced, more toward the thunderbolt kind of God than the loving kind of God. But what I'm hoping is that as we look through this psalm, you'll actually get to see that love is very much in the picture in what's going on here.

God's desire to show grace toward us is very much in the picture. One of the other things that I hope you'll see is that this psalm actually gives us a sense of who we are and how we fit into the world.

I don't know if you've picked up on the Israel Folau comments that he didn't tweet, did he? He put them on his Instagram feed and how the response to that has led to his... Has he been sacked yet? I'm not sure. They want to sack him if they can actually get in touch with him. So there's this reaction to what Israel Folau said in expressing his faith that has kind of shocked a lot of Christians.

[3 : 27] I've noticed in my own Facebook feed that folk have actually been responding to it in a variety of different ways and I guess one of the most common features of those responses is a concern for where that leaves us as Christians.

Where does it leave us in our desire to express our faith, in our desire to actually introduce other people to God? What does it mean for us? What is the future of Australia?

Where is this country going? Well, this psalm tells us not just where our country is going but it tells us the trajectory of the whole world, the universe.

It gives us a sense of the history of mankind and where it's going under God's hands. It gives us a sense of why people are so strongly objecting to Israel Folau and hearing only condemnation in his words and it gives us, I hope, a sense of comfort that God actually truly is in control.

So let's have a look at this passage then and start to break it open. We get verses 1 to 3, we get to see the sense of rebellion in the worldwide sense.

[4 : 40] We read these words, 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 their cords from us.

You see here a picture of universal rebellion against God. Now when I read this and when you read it perhaps you read the nations and the peoples as the whole world.

But when the Israelites read it and sang it and meditated on it, they read it as, well, it's everyone who is not Israel. They didn't read it as all of us, they read it as, they read it as from the perspective of us and them and they are the nations, they are the peoples.

And I've got to say that frankly I'm inclined to want to read a psalm like this that way. I'm inclined to want to read it as, well, yeah, this applies to everyone else but me or at least everyone else but me and you guys as well.

Yeah, we want to stay in fellowship. So everyone else but us. We're okay. It's the world that's a mess. And if they just turn to God like I have, then everything would be fine.

[5 : 58] So Israel, they thought it was about everyone else at the time that this psalm was written and at the time when they were singing this up until a certain point. And they thought that the rest of the world were the rebels who were actually deserving of the kind of judgment that's described in this psalm.

But this psalm is sharp-edged because those who anticipated this king, this anointed one being in thrones and his rule, those who anticipated this were the ones who raged against him and ultimately killed him.

If you just take a note in your, if you take notes in your bulletin or whatever, take a note of Acts chapter 4 verses 25 to 28. Because in those verses, the disciples actually apply these verses to the people who killed Jesus.

Now think of who they were. They actually named them in this prayer that they pray in Acts 4. They named them Herod, Pilate, and the peoples of Israel.

What the psalmist goes on to describe is the shape and tone of the world we live in, no exceptions. What we need to do is to begin to hear these words and ask, how?

[7 : 15] How does it apply to me? As I read or sing these words, where am I positioned in this psalm? Because this message is confronting.

They, that is the people of the world, rage and plot. Notice this is a heart attitude.

It starts with a heart attitude. Raging and plotting isn't just something that's an external thing. It's actually something that comes from within us. It's a passionate response. Now maybe you're not thinking, you're thinking that you're not passionate in that sense.

You're not a rager. So you're wondering, what does that actually look like? Well, Bruce Waltke, an Old Testament theologian, summed it up really helpfully.

He describes it like this. He says, in the 21st century, we want liberty without law, freedom without form and love without commitment. Let me just flesh those out a little bit for you.

[8 : 15] So liberty without law. There's a growing perception that limits remove liberty. When someone writes a law that restricts what I want to do, well, we feel like they're restricting my liberty.

It rises in us in thoughts like, you don't have the right to tell me what I can and can't do. Funnily enough, going down that path is anarchy, where anarchy means without government.

So liberty without law or freedom without form, where freedom actually functions on the level of personal identity or expression. Rather than coming up against rules, we come up against perceptions.

I want to be free to be the version of myself that I choose to be. Freedom without reference to who or what I am. And how much has that come out in the way that laws are being shaped at the moment.

And any expectation that's contrary to my view will be interpreted as an assault to my personal freedom of choice or expression. And finally, he said love without commitment.

[9 : 23] You see, I want to be unencumbered by demands. Nobody should have a hold on me. I should be free to move in and out of relationships as I choose. I don't want love to be unconditional.

I don't want to have to be giving without guarantees that I'm going to receive. I'm going to suggest to you that these three things stand in direct opposition to God's character.

So this lifestyle actually requires life without God. Our hearts turn from God. And with our hearts go our minds.

This attitude of heart takes form in the mind as they plot, set, take counsel. We read in this section, these first three verses. What the psalmist describes here is nothing other than rebellion.

Plotting to overthrow God. Setting ourselves on God's throne in place of the rightful king. Taking counsel among ourselves. Obviously rejecting God's counsel. I don't naturally and easily move toward God is what this psalm is saying.

[10 : 30] Far from it. Rebellion is in my blood. Why? Why though? Notice this psalm starts with the question, why?

As all this is being described, the overarching question the psalmist asks is, why? Why do we rebel? Well, the answer is in our perception, the perception of the plotters.

They say in verse 3, let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us. Now we understand the desire for freedom, but to desire it in this way means that they believe that they're currently slaves.

They feel like they're in chains. They perceive their state as tied down in bondage. They believe that God is holding them back.

And their claim carries echoes of Satan's lie in Genesis chapter 3. Do you remember that? In the midst of the world of evidence of the goodness of God, they choose to believe otherwise.

[11:42] So Genesis 3 verse 1. Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, did God actually say you shall not eat of any tree in the garden? Here's a law.

And the woman said to the serpent, we may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden. Neither shall you touch it lest you die.

There's a perception of liberty or lack of. But the serpent said to the woman, and here's the kicker, the serpent said to the woman, you will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

Why would they think they're in bondage? Because as long as God rules, they believe there is no liberty, no freedom.

In other words, God is not good. He's just our jailer. The psalmist then goes on to look at God's rule and to reflect on that.

[12:51] You see, humanity, in his mind, has actually picked a fight with the biggest person in the universe. So what is going to happen next? Well, in summary, God will continue to reign unchallenged and unimpeded.

In verses 4 to 6, we discover this. He who sits in the heavens laughs. The Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath and terrify them in his fury, saying, as for me, I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.

Unchallenged, God's rule. God's rule persists unchallenged. The psalmist explains, God sits on a throne far beyond our reach to challenge.

So God looks on from this position and laughs at their futile expressions of defiance. He holds them in derision. Have you ever seen this power difference play out in your lives?

I know when I was a parent with much younger children, when they were very young, we used to have play fights, Friday night, fight night. We'd have play fights and they'd just pile on top of me, drag me to the ground and climb all over me and jump up onto the lounge and then jump off of the lounge onto me.

[14:04] And they'd just bounce off me. And I only had to use one weapon and that was, the only weapon I was allowed to use in the fight was tickling. Now you might say that's a pretty extreme weapon, you know, tickling is pretty bad and maybe your sort of person doesn't like that.

But that's all I was allowed to do was tickle them and that was enough for me to defeat those three kids all in one go. Let me tell you now, I don't let them do this now. But, but I want to, just want to point out that we're not like that.

We're not like these children that are going to grow up and actually become powerful enough to resist anyone and anything that stands in our way. We aren't growing to a point where we can challenge God on any level.

There is no height that we can launch ourselves from that is above Him. No weight that we can bring to bear that will move Him. And no exercise of intellect that will confound Him in any way. The only thing that we've achieved with our efforts is to plunge the world into turmoil. and it's really interesting that humanity is so committed to rebelling against God that we blame that turmoil on Him too.

[15:13] We've moved from resting in paradise to struggling for peace and we still blame God. But God's rule continues. He rules unimpeded.

The psalmist makes this clear by describing the effect of God's rule when he speaks God exercises His wrath and the response humanity is terrified.

We have picked a fight with the strongest person in the universe and he plans to fight back. God's plan involves setting or enthroning the word setting set there actually means enthrone. the rightful king. We're just pretenders to the throne when we try and claim it for ourselves. God's king is able to take a seat on the heavenly throne far above any position of authority that we could claim.

And this is a terrifying event because everyone is a rebel. And in the ancient Near East there is only one outcome for rebels. That's death.

[16:19] The nations of the time reserved the worst form of death for rebels. Methods that inflicted the maximum pain and humiliation. Methods like crucifixion were widely used in the nations around Israel.

I don't know if you know of the story Spartacus. That was 100 BC where 6,000 rebel slaves were crucified on the Appian Way on the way back into Rome, one of the main roads into Rome. 6,000 rebels were crucified one after the other. And the enthronement of this rightful king would mean that the rebellion is over.

So punishment of this kind of magnitude is coming. And this is what God, this is what the psalmist goes on to describe as he lays out God's plan in verses 7 to 9.

We read the words, Here he describes the king, the enthronement of the king and his complete victory.

[17:44] Let's look at the king here. The psalmist speaks in a way that's actually reminiscent of a coronation ceremony of the time. And it's also reminiscent of God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7.

Again, something to note down and have a look back at later. But in that chapter of 2 Samuel, Yahweh promised that a king of David's line would be a son to him and that that son would rule forever.

Here, the Lord, Yahweh, personally swears in this new king. You are my son. Today, I have begotten you. Although, I think it's in Acts 2 that this psalm is attributed to David as having been written by David.

David's obviously talking about someone who isn't him. He's actually referring to the promise that God made to him. So he's not applying this to himself. He's not saying, I am that king. He's saying, this king is coming.

The arrival of the eternal king. It's past tense to emphasize the certainty of this king's arrival.

[18:50] In the minds of the Israelites, this was a king who was very much expected but hadn't arrived yet. He was the one that God's people were waiting for and they expected this king to restore the fortunes of Israel.

So it was an emphatic declaration of kingship with an emphatic expression of victory involved too. This was not just a king but the king. The king who would be universally and emphatically victorious. Not only would the king be eternal but his rule would be universal.

The nations would become his right. The world, his possession. This ruler would be unimpeachable. This would be no Donald Trump. You could not resist the rule of this king. His rule would be bloody too. And it's kind of uncomfortable the way that he describes this. But perhaps the worse your situation and the more desperate you get, the more willing you are to hear the emphatic nature of this victory.

[20:00] The more willing you are perhaps to accept a ruler who will get the job done. We have examples of that in recent political history.

So for example, the people of the Philippines recently elected a president to take on the drug gangs. Zero tolerance. The people were given the authority to literally shoot on sight. And they have.

They've killed 12,000 people in the past two years. The people of Brazil have more recently done the same thing. The country is struggling under economic mismanagement, under corruption. And the violence is just rife within the country. Over 60,000 murders a year in Brazil. So they elected an extremist. A man who is allegedly turning the country into a police state according to an interview I heard on Radio National this week.

From a distance, these kind of things make us feel uncomfortable. But when we read this psalm, it almost sounds like, is this where things are going? Is this where this king is going to go with things? Because his rule is emphatic.

[21 : 09] The psalmist's image of the king's victory over his opponents is equally brutal. The Lord says in verse 9, You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

Not much lovey-dovey in that, is there? Break. Smash. If we open these words up a little bit, and you might see it in some of your Bibles, that word break can actually be, there's no vowels in the Hebrew, original Hebrew.

So you can actually re-vocalize that word to mean another word, which is rule. It may well be that that's what's intended here. And that's why your Bibles may well actually have a footnote here. Where rule is actually literally meaning shepherd. And it fits with the imagery that's actually being used in this verse. Because the rod of iron is actually representative of the shepherd's weapon of defense.

The kings of the ancient Near East carried a scepter as a symbol of their shepherding, caring role over their people. They were to devote themselves to defending their sheep. This imagery that's being used here is meant to be defensive.

[22 : 20] But does it make you flinch that it's being expressed in this kind of way? The psalmist writes a song of introduction to the book of songs that encourages God's people to long for this kind of king.

They meditated on these words as they sang the song. And they hoped for it to be fulfilled. It almost makes you wonder if religion really is the cause of all the violence in the world when you read verses like this. Until you understand who this king is and how this victory was achieved. then you realize that this psalm is grace filled. It's offering God's grace to the world. The psalmist writes in verse 7 I will tell of the decree the Lord said to me you are my son today I have begotten you.

This king has come and the New Testament writers recognized him. Again some verses to take down they're actually up on the screen as well for you to take note so you don't have to just get them down as quickly as you can.

[23 : 31] They'll be there for a few moments. In Hebrews 1.5 we discover that this psalm is about Jesus. Jesus is the son who will rule over everyone and everything higher than the angels.

In Hebrews 5.5 this psalm is about Jesus as high priest. He is appointed to sacrifice on behalf of the people to protect them from their greatest enemy death.

death. In Acts 4.25 the opposition in this psalm results in Jesus' death. The disciples understood as I already said earlier the disciples understood that the plotting against the Lord and his anointed was fulfilled in Jesus' execution.

How? A traitor's death. A rebel's death. The death that we deserved. And in Acts 13.

33. This psalm is about Jesus' resurrection. Today I have begotten you is applied directly to Jesus' resurrection. And it's like we picked a fight with the strongest person in the universe.

[24 : 44] The new Avengers movie is coming out. They're all still part of the universe. We're talking about the creator of the universe. the strongest person who exists in the universe. We stole from him what was most precious.

We humiliated him publicly. We committed the most blatant injustice and rebellion. And there he is, ready to fall on us with the full weight of his anger.

And he had all the power necessary and every reason to crush us. And yet that person fought back by taking it out on himself.

The king ruled by establishing justice. And King Jesus ruled by choosing to have the full weight of this justice bear down on him. The justice we deserved fell on him.

Grace filled response. People do blame religion for the problems of the world. But when they blame Christianity, do they really understand what's at the heart of it? at the heart of the Christian faith is Christ, this king.

[25 : 54] The one who has every right to punish us and yet chooses to bear the punishment himself, should we only trust him? We do get Christianity wrong.

Even Christians get Christianity wrong. But friends, the solution isn't less Christianity. The truth is the world needs more of it. We need this king to reign over us.

And so the psalmist concludes with presenting us with a choice in verses 10-12. Now therefore, O kings, be wise, be warned, O rulers of the earth.

Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.
be wise, be warned, there is a real choice to be made here. Accept this king or accept the judgment he offered to bear on your behalf.

[27 : 02] The psalmist has a perspective of God that I think we struggle to maintain, that there is no equality with God to be offered here. God is God. God is God to be to be with fear and rejoicing with trembling are clear signs that we really do recognize this king for who he is.

And understanding his anger and his right to exercise justice are sure signs that we actually recognize who we are. But blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Blessed are all who take refuge in him. Let me finish by saying that this blessing is not a call to religion. It's a call to God.

Come to the church and hopefully you'll find a caring community. You'll discover a principled and appealing lifestyle. One that I think actually enriches life for anybody.

But to come for those reasons would be to miss the point. The psalmist calls us to kiss the son. It's a sign of covenant commitment, of submission, of intimacy.

[28 : 17] It's a personal relational commitment to this God, this king, this God, king, who personally and relationally and emphatically broke into history.

But this choice in this psalm is not for a lifestyle, that's religion. And religion is comfortable nothingness at best.

This choice is for God, the God who graciously offers us peace with himself. Friends, don't settle for comfortable.

Settle for God, for blessed are all who take refuge in him. Amen.