

# Messiah

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[ 0 : 00 ] It's our practice in summer here at St. John's to spend sort of five or six weeks looking at the Psalms. And tonight we are week four into a five-week series looking at God's big story through the Psalms.

So we've looked at creation, law, kingship, exile, and today the theme is the Messiah. So what has the Psalms got to say about the Messiah?

So we're looking at Psalm 2 and it's just absolutely brilliant. Now it sort of operates on two horizons as a way of introducing it. So these two horizons, there's like an immediate horizon and there's an ultimate horizon to this Psalm.

Scholars think it was probably, let's talk about the immediate one. Scholars think it was probably some sort of coronation Psalm. So you're sort of like when you're installing a king, you'd use this as part of the liturgy.

And in Israel's case, it was a country surrounded by lots of hostile nations that wanted to get rid of it. Hence all the raging nations stuff in this Psalm.

[ 1 : 04 ] So that's the immediate context of the Psalm. But there's an ultimate horizon as well. It's the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament. And why is that?

Because the things said about this king in this Psalm are too huge and too great for it to just be talking about an earthly king.

Because it says things like this, the whole earth will be your possession. The New Testament writers latched on to Psalm 2 pretty early and used it widely because they believed, rightly they believed, that this Psalm was pointing them to Jesus, God's chosen king.

The only one who could actually fulfill the kind of stuff it talks about here. Actually, the word anointed in the Psalm, verse 2, it's actually the Hebrew word Messiah, it's the Greek word Christ. So our interest this morning is in its ultimate horizon as it talks about Jesus. So let's get stuck into it.

[ 2 : 13 ] So there are four stanzas, like four little sections. We'll start with verses 1 to 3, the first little section. Why do the nations rage the people's plot in vain?

Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cause from us. So the Psalm begins with sort of astonishment in the form of a question. Astonishment. Why are these people opposing God?

That's the question that David, who, if he's the author of this, is posing. Why would people oppose God? This is madness. This is crazy. You can't just push God away.

You can't actually marginalize God. There's a million things to say about this. But I just want to zoom in on one particular word in verse 1, which I think is very interesting.

It's the word plot. It's a great word, plot. Why do the people plot in vain? If you're new to the whole Christian thing, the Old Testament, which the Psalm is part of, was written in Hebrew.

[ 3 : 23 ] So this word plot, there's a Hebrew word which has been translated into English as plot. But this Hebrew word actually appears in Psalm 1 as well.

And in Psalm 1, it's translated as meditate. Meditate. So in Psalm 1, the individual is called to meditate on God's word, which literally means to murmur to yourself.

You murmur to yourself. So in Psalm 1, the blessed person murmurs the words of God to themselves. It's like, you know how sometimes you sort of get a melody stuck in your head, like a tune stuck in your head?

I imagine it sort of works a bit like that. There's this quiet tune playing in your head. That's the words of God. Here, though, in Psalm 2, it's translated plot.

Meditating. Plot. These folks in Psalm 2 are meditating on, not the words of God, they're meditating on opposition to God. So they're plotting against God's king.

[ 4 : 31 ] So the plotting bits, it's less, I hate God, I hate God kind of stuff. It's more the murmuring of the heart. This quiet inner melody that says, I want to live my life on my own terms.

And that's what verse 3 is about. You see, it's kind of italicized in quotes there. This murmuring, this meditating, this plotting, it gets verbalized in verse 3.

And they shouted out, they say, let us burst their bonds apart. Let us cast away these cords from us. And do you see here their view of God?

There's this basic belief that God wants to constrain their life. And to follow God, to come under His authority, would feel like you're being tied up.

And you want to be free from that. It's the belief that coming under the authority of God would lead to a restricted life. This is what many people believe.

[ 5 : 36 ] Perhaps you believe this. It's very common. Becoming a Christian is, you know, like it can be perceived as, it's a threat to do and act and love what I want.

It puts at risk things I really want. And these are things I absolutely need to be happy. To be fulfilled. I need these things.

And God could stop me doing them. Now, would you mind at all if I launched into a rather long-winded and controversial example?

I'll take that nervous laughter as a yes. So, two weeks ago, I did a summer school course with Sarah Williams. It's a very good course called Sex, Gender and Marriage, a Historical Perspective. Do you still want to hear this example? Good. Good. I did it with my friend Matthew Key at the back. Who else was with me in that course? Anyone else? Anyone else?

[ 6 : 48 ] Oh, yes. There you go. Willie Shane Ross as well. It was a fantastic course. And we talked a lot about queer theory. Q-U-E-E-R. Queer theory.

Queer theory. Which is a field of critical theory. Which is very, very interesting, actually. It's very interesting. And it's a very important school of thought right now.

And one thing that came through strongly in the course that was summed up by somebody at the end was that in both queer theory, both queer theory and historic Christianity as it's understood, they both desire human flourishing.

They both, both these worldviews, both these perspectives, they both want people to thrive. But one big difference in these worldviews is where the locus of control is.

So queer theory, one of the things it does is it challenges cultural narratives around gender and sex. And to be fair, you know, toxic versions of femininity and toxic versions of masculinity, they should be challenged.

[ 7 : 56 ] But after deconstructing these things, so what it is, it deconstructs these, you know, sort of narratives around these things, deconstructs them. And then queer theory says, so gender, sex, identity, these are fluid things and they are up to you to construct.

You can sort of curate an identity, a gender, a sex, etc. And queer theory has been enormously impactful in modern culture.

And it's sort of riding on the back of a wider cultural narrative, which we'll get to in a moment. But I'll give you a couple of examples. For example, how it relates to sex. So sex, on the whole, sex in terms of the act of sex, on the whole is regarded as a private matter with no relationship to sort of order in the cosmos, right?

And the only moral boundary, the only legal moral boundary connected to sex is consent. And we're very glad that that moral boundary exists.

It should be there. But it sits alone. So the difference between legitimate sex and illegitimate sex differs only in terms of consent. And from a Christian worldview, historic Christian worldview would look at that and we would say, well, that's a reductionist view of sex.

[ 9 : 18 ] And sex in that context loses some of its meaning. It's lost some of its meaning. So another example. In queer theory, our bodies don't necessarily, like our physical bodies, don't necessarily have to communicate anything vital about our gender identity.

So gender identity has been untethered from biology, from religion. It's a fluid thing. Now, I know these issues of sex and gender are incredibly complex and very controversial and there's much pain around it.

And this is a woefully insufficient treatment of it. But I'm just trying to hold up these two different worldviews here. And in the broader strokes, here's what I'm trying to say.

God has given meaning and moral bounds to sex. Gender is a gift that is given to people. And Christian worldview, modern worldview, very heavily impacted by this very important sort of field of critical thought, queer theory, says, no.

No, it's not. No, it's not. No, it's not. Using the words of Psalms. No, we want to burst bonds. We want to cast away cords so that we can decide what these things mean for us.

[10:41] And I'm not, you know, particularly picking on queer theory. It's I stated a couple of weeks ago. But what it is, is it's at the pointy end of a larger cultural narrative around what it means to be a human being.

And what it means to define self. What I want to do now is I want to point you to two authors. Two authors.

Neither of them are sort of, you know, orthodox evangelicals. One of them is Charles Taylor, who's a Canadian Catholic philosopher. The guy, Philip Reif, who is a Jewish academic and sociologist. Both very, very important and both talk about what we've been talking about here. They have a lot to say about this stuff. Let's talk about Charles Taylor. He wrote a really important book called *The Secular Age*.

*The Secular Life*. *The Secular Age*. Which is a tome that's very difficult to read. There is a short version of the book written by James K. Smith called *How Not to Be Secular*. Which is like a 150-page reader on this impossible-to-read tome.

[11:50] Okay, so Charles Taylor. What these guys do, Charles Taylor and Philip Reif, is they try to help us understand how do we get to the point where people can be, he describes as self-validating.

As having a completely internal self. How do we get to this point? Because it's actually quite a new thing. It's a very modern concept. So what these two guys do is they trace traditional systems of thought.

They look at those and they compare those to sort of post-modern thought. And they hold these things up and they say, here are the differences to help us understand how we got from traditional, ancient, to where we are today.

All right. So how do we get to the point where people individually decide what is right and right, right and wrong for them? So Charles Taylor, I have lots of examples. I'll just give you one from him.

He says that in traditional cultures, which are in the West, a long time ago, but still exist around the world.

[12:56] He says in traditional cultures, you look outside of yourself to determine the highest good. You look outside of yourself to determine the highest good.

And you say to your heart, heart, you have to live according to this highest good. Heart, you can't just do whatever you want. In modern times, you go inside and you decide who you are and what is good.

And you say to culture, you must honor me. So instead of, like in the ancient times, you would argue with yourself, telling yourself you must align with what's outside, this widely understood common good, this widely understood higher good, you argue with what's outside.

And you tell it, you have to align with what's inside me. And that is a radical shift in how we form human beings and how we see ourselves.

Again, he's trying to help us understand modern day secularism, modern day postmodern thought as it relates to identity. Philip Reif, he is the Jewish scholar.

[14:08] He wrote a book called *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, late 60s. Another really important book on culture. He's helpful here. He again compares modernity with the ancient world. And he says in the ancient traditions, this is one of the examples he used.

He says in the ancient traditions, everyone sort of agreed with what's wrong with the world. And he said what's wrong with the world is selfishness. The world is a mess because of selfishness. So a summary of that would be somebody saying, you know, what's wrong with the world is people living for themselves.

What these selfish people need is they need to be connected to some kind of sacred order.

Something outside of themselves that's bigger than them. Modernity flips that over.

And the modern narrative is what's wrong with the world is people saying there's a sacred order that I have to live according to. And what will fix the world is being free to do whatever I want.

Being free from those bounds. See, modern culture, it's like modern culture says what we need to be saved from is the idea that we need to be saved.

[ 15 : 22 ] Because I want to decide what's right and wrong for me. Let us burst these bonds apart. Let's cast these cords off us.

I want to live outside of any authority structures that will constrict me. Now if these ideas... Look, here's the thing about these ideas. They're very attractive, aren't they? Right? This postmodern thought, the queer theory, it's such an attractive narrative. And it's bled into every crack in modern culture.

And if these two Catholic and Jewish philosophers are a bit too highbrow for you, just watch Babe. We watched it the other day. It's such a great movie.

It's about the little pig that wants to be a sheepdog. Just watch Babe. It's a great example of this. That these sort of... I mean, it's not trying to, like, you know, corrupt children.

[ 16 : 22 ] It just reflects culture, right? Just reflects culture really well. This untethering of what I'm supposed to be. Or Queen Elsa, right? From the movie Frozen.

There's this scene... You know the Let It Go song? So I've seen it a hundred times. So you know the Let It Go song where she's transformed from...

into, like, the Ice Queen? Do you guys know this movie I'm talking about? Okay, right, okay. So there's this scene where she's sort of like, you know, she's not going to fight it anymore.

Let It Go. She's not going to fight it anymore. And she goes, you know what? I'm going to throw off all these things. I'm just going to be this amazing Ice Queen and just use all my powers. And the subtext is it destroys the village.

But anyway, like, so... But it's interesting to me, a couple of things about that. When she's transformed, when she decides to throw off all this sense of duty and just be herself, she's sexier, isn't she?

[ 17 : 23 ] She's kind of saucy, the way she dresses. It's like this is a better version of her somehow. More importantly, here's a line from Let It Go, which we sing all the time at our house. It's time to see what I can do to test the limits and break through.

No right, no wrong, no rules for me. I'm free. I actually was singing it, bro. That was my natural voice.

My singing voice. People have told me I have the voice of a Kiwi angel. Apparently not. Apparently not. Let us burst their bonds apart and cast the cords from us.

It's such a great story. Like, I love that movie. And I love that movie, babe. Like, it's such a great storyline. And it's based on a way of seeing the self and our relationship with the cosmos.

It's actually very recent history. It's unsort of tethered from a sense that they could be a higher good that we must align ourselves with.

[ 18 : 35 ] And again, Frozen's not satanic. I'm just, like, it's just, it just reflects, it just reflects really well a cultural climate, right? That's what it does.

It reflects a cultural climate. Okay. After that, rather lengthy aside. Again, these issues of gender and sex, these are difficult conversations. And just as one more very short aside, though, there's such difficult conversations.

When I preached this this morning, people said to me, oh, you're very brave. You're very brave. It's a shame that Christians retreat from having these conversations in a thoughtful and wise way. That there's a lack of civil discourse around these issues.

Because Christians actually, we do actually have a very compelling narrative ourselves. We actually have a wonderful story to tell. And the thing is, is we won't tell it, is we will remain silent about it, and we won't want to talk about it unless we have great confidence in the abundant life of Christ, unless we have an enormous confidence in the life that Christ has to offer us.

Wherever we are on that spectrum, whatever we think, Christ has abundant life for us. If we don't believe that, we're going to stay silent, or we capitulate to culture. Let's move on.

[ 19 : 53 ] So that's the first stanza. I'll do the last three in just a couple of minutes. So there's three more.

Verses four to six. Stanza two. He who sits in the heavens laughs. As for me, I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.

So the second stanza, we're taken from the earth into the throne room of God. And what's God's response to people sort of rejecting the sense of authority over them? God laughs.

That's quite disconcerting, actually. It's, and I don't think God is laughing at people. God is not laughing at the pain around this stuff. I think he's laughing at the idea that his creatures, that his creation, can think they can live without him.

It's a ridiculous thought. I have a son who's four and a half. I imagine a scenario in my head where I come home one day from work and he passes me in the hallway wearing his little backpack and he's got a change of clothes in it and an apple and a, you know, sandwich.

[ 21 : 00 ] And he's like, I've had it with you guys. I'm going out into the world by myself. I'm doing my own thing. This is not working, right? See, that's, I would laugh at him because it's a ridiculous notion that he can have this fulfilled life by himself.

I think that's the sense of what's going on here. God laughs, but then he still has this problem of these people who don't want to come under his authority and, you know, so what does he do? What's his strategy? I have set my king on Zion, which is the historic place. Zion was the place that people ruled from back in the days. God's response to humanity's rejection of him is to send a king. It's to send a king. So in the second stanza, we learn there's a king. There's this amazing king. In the first stanza, we learn that we reject him, but there's a king. Moving on to the third stanza, look at it there.

You see that line. This is verses seven to nine. I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your position. This third stanza, the nature, the scope of the kingdom is fleshed out.

[ 22 : 08 ] And as I said in Psalm 2, no earthly king ever did this. No earthly king actually ever pulled this off, which is why the New Testament writers say this is pointing us to Jesus.

This is telling us about the kind of kingship that Jesus will have. God's promised king is Jesus. And he will have authority over the whole world and he will not share that authority with anyone.

Let's move to the final stanza. So the second and third stanza, there's this king. He has rulership over the whole world. It's all his.

First stanza, we reject him. This last stanza, stanza four, verses 10 to 12, tell us how desperately we need him though. Now, therefore, O kings, be wise, be warned, rulers of the earth.

Serve the king with fear, rejoice with trembling, kiss the son, least to be angry, and you perish. His wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

[ 23 : 10 ] Goodness, there is a lot there. Let's just look at a couple of things. Rejoice with trembling. Isn't that a really interesting phrase? Rejoice with trembling.

In a universe with a real God, who claims ownership of all, and we come under his submission of, we are Christians, there is real fear, and there is real joy.

We don't play games with God. We make him our highest treasure. So this is the difference. In people in the world, we make Christ our highest treasure, our highest goal, or he is our enemy.

That sounds so harsh, I know, but this is what it's saying. We make him our highest goal, our greatest treasure, or he is our enemy. Why do I say that word enemy? Because he's a threat to our happiness if we don't want to come under his authority.

Also, this line here about, no, no, I'm going to go to that last line here.

[ 24 : 18 ] Verse 2. Right, the very last line of Psalm 2, sorry. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. So, God's anger is real against humanity. He rejects him. Because a humanity that rejects him hurts his creation.

God doesn't like that. He's angry about that. He's rightfully and justly angry about that. But blessed are those who take refuge in him. What a wonderful way for this to end. What does this mean?

And I'm ending right here. The only safe place from the anger of God is in God. The only safe place from the anger of God is actually in God.

You cannot escape God. You cannot run away from God. You can only go into God to escape his righteous anger. And there, in that place, is joy and there's peace.

And God, in our age of such confusion around identity, God speaks to our hearts and he tells us who we are. Amen.

[ 25 : 21 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.