

Why Do the Nations Rage?

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[0 : 00] Well, let's pray. Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word in Christ's name. Amen. If you're sort of newish here, no, let me say this. I just want to start by saying thanks for these past six months. You folks have been really awesome to my family and a quite a difficult time for us. So thank you for your prayers and your gifts and meals and phone calls and emails and visits. It's been just, we have been overwhelmed. And I want to point out a particularly stellar effort made by Carl Beauchong and John Lewis. Where are they? Ah, they're hiding. And they, I think it was the night, so Sadie had a, I mean, Beatrice had a surgery on Monday two weeks ago in the morning, heart surgery. And then in the evening, these guys brought a meal to us and they brought a bottle of wine. And I said, I said, team, I'm pretty sure we can't drink wine in the pediatric intensive care unit of the BC Children's Hospital. And

John said, oh, it's okay, mate. I'll put it in a brown paper bag. So yeah, here we go.

John's Australian, just to put that all in context there. We're going to take a kind of a break from, well, it's not really a break from Mark, but we're taking a kind of a break from the Gospel of Mark. Let me tell you what I mean.

We're going to be in this Gospel for about nine months, still about sort of June, July next year. And every now and then we're going to stop and look back over the last previous month or however long period, and we're going to go, okay, I'm going to ask myself, Aaron, is there anything I missed? You know, or not missed, is there anything I glanced over, I skimmed over because, for time, you know? Is there anything that would have been really awesome to talk about a lot, but you just didn't really have time? And this is one of those weeks. And what I skimmed over recently was, serendipitously, I guess, was the baptism of Jesus. And in particular, the words of the Father that Jesus spoke over his son. And he said this, and Dan read it out at the beginning of the service, this is my beloved son in whom I'm well pleased. And I did say on that night that it referenced three Old Testament passages.

Well, it's the this is my son part, which is really, really important, and I think I gave it about 30 seconds, and it's worth a whole sermon. So tonight, I want to talk about that.

[2 : 53] And in that, the Father is saying, when he says, this is my son, he's quoting Psalm 2. And the expectation would have been that the hearers would have thought, okay, Psalm 2, I know that, and would have heard the whole thing in their head, and all that the Psalm says. So it wasn't just God cleverly using a piece of Scripture to say, you know, that's my boy. No, he's all that's embodied in that passage. God the Father is saying to his son. And so I want to preach on Psalm 2, and it's a fabulous Psalm for many reasons. It helps us understand Mark better because, well, it's a messianic Psalm, meaning it's all about Jesus. It has a great summary of the gospel in it. It describes the world, the state of the world back then, the state of the world today.

It's the most quoted Psalm in the New Testament. And it's got a bite to it. It's got an edge to it. It's this, I mean, you heard it read, well read, by the way. You heard it read. It's this uncomfortable little Jewish hymn transcends 3,000 years of history and grabs a hold of you and asks some very poignant questions. Folks, it would be very helpful if you opened your Bibles.

Let's open our Bibles and have a look at Psalm 2. There are four basic stanzas.

Stanza 1 is verses 1 to 3. Why do the nations rage and the people's plot and vain, the kings of the earth, set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and his anointed. This word anointed in Hebrew is Messiah. In Greek, it's Christ. Against his anointed saying, let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us. So the Psalm begins with astonishment by the writer.

The writer is astonished. Why are these people opposing God? Why do the nations rage, the people's plot in vain? So David, in this opening sort of rhetorical question, is expressing the tragic

and how tragic and futile it is to try and push God out of our life. I want to point out something very interesting here, this word plot, the people's plot in vain. This word is translated in Psalm 1 as meditate. It's the same word, meditate. So in Psalm 1, it's talking about an individual who meditates on God's word. And it literally means murmuring to oneself. And in Psalm 2, they're meditating on their opposition to God. And I say that because plotting against God, opposition to God, is not necessarily like this overt, you know, shaking your fist at God, I hate God. It can be a quiet murmuring in our heart. And if you are here and you're not a Christian, you know, this first part is talking to you. And you might think, come on, mate, it's a bit rough.

[6 : 16] You know, I don't rage against God. I don't, I'm not plotting the downfall of the church. And, you know, I'm sure you don't plot the downfall of the church. You see, opposition to God often expresses itself in the quiet murmuring of our heart. A heart that says, I want to be free.

I want to be self-determining. And that's opposition to God, according to Psalm 2. And this murmuring, this meditating, this plotting climaxes in the resolve of verse 3 here. Verse 3, let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.

And the people in this passage believe following God is a constraint. And that's the lie, right? That's the lie that they believe. They think that following God, committing their life to God, would be akin to being tied up. That's the picture there. That following God would mean a restricted life.

And this is why the people in Psalm 2, this is what the people in Psalm 2 believe. And perhaps, maybe you believe this. It's a very common belief. You know, I can't become a Christian because being a Christian is a threat to do and act and love what I want. And I don't want to put that at risk. Well, can I say respectfully that that thinking is futile and ironic, I think. I say that for a number of reasons. First, I mean, if the murmuring in your heart says this, you know, if I can just get out of God's range, I'm going to be free. Well, you know, the problem is, is you can't get off God's radar.

[8 : 03] You know, you can't get off God's radar. You will be held accountable for how you've lived. And the Psalm talks about that in the next stanza. So you can't get away from God because he's, I mean, he's God, right? Secondly, if you reject God in order to be free, you become a slave to yourself or something else.

And I say that because our hearts were designed to adore something, to trust in something. And if our hearts are not adoring and trusting in the thing that was made to adore and trust in, it's God, then it will take on something false and it will poison you. But this lie, I want to be free. I want to be self-determining. I'd be so much happier. Perhaps you think that as a Christian, or if you're not a Christian, no, I'd be so much more miserable if I became a Christian. This lie, this desire is very enticing.

And I know the seeds of that lie exist in my heart. And so I'm going to presume that they exist in yours. God, forgive us. God, forgive me. God, change us.

Stanza 2, this is verses 4 to 6. Let me read them again. He who sits in the heavens laughs. The Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath and terrifying them in his fury, saying, as for me, I've set my king on Zion, my holy hill.

It's so interesting that stanza, isn't it? We're taken into the throne room of God. And word comes up to the throne room that humanity is, you know, shaking their fist at God.

[9 : 48] And it says here that God scoffs. God scoffs at that. It's very disconcerting, I think. We see in verse 4 and 5 there, our rebellion in contrast to God's authority and sovereignty just looks ridiculous.

And then we have this next verse, verse 6, which you might think is a funny kind of step, a bit of a jarring step to all of a sudden talk about a king.

So the question is, how does God practically deal with our rebellion? And it's in an unexpected way. Verse 6, I've set my king on Zion. This is God's response to humanity's rejection of God.

It's not, I'll show you. I'll snap my fingers and everything will be okay. It's a king. A king.

A king like no other. And we love kings. In theory. Like the idea of kings is great. And when the idea of kings has been part of popular culture for hundreds of years, right?

[10 : 58] You think of just three really quickly. Like Robin Hood, right? So you've got Robin Hood, you know, fighting the hypocrisy of King John, hoping that Richard the Lionheart will return and make everything okay.

I mean, that's the principle, right? Good king, good times. You know, good king, good times. Everything's going to be okay. We love these legends about kings. King Arthur, the king who ruled

over what?

Over Camelot. This is this kind of idealized kingdom that would be so cool if we could get that. Lord of the Rings, you know, it's not just a story about Frodo destroying the ring.

A major thread in that story is the rise of Aragorn. The idea that there is a true king and all will be well when Aragorn is on the throne.

We're fascinated by kings and mythology and story, which is amazing because the actual record of human kings is terrible. And most kingdoms have been toppled, right, in favor of a democracy.

[12:03] So why do we be fascinated with kingdom? Why is it such a part of our culture? It's because our heart knows that we actually need a king.

There is something in our makeup that knows we need a king who will rule justly, who will make things right, which makes our rejection of the king all the more kind of loopy, doesn't it?

So the second stanza I just talked about, it tells us that there is a true king. One king that God has chosen, King Jesus.

The first stanza tells us, okay, there's this king, right, but we push this king away. And why do we do that? Just one more reminder of why we do that. George MacDonald, you may know George MacDonald.

He was an English fantasy writer. A lot of fantasy references to that. I'm a big fan. Anyway, so George MacDonald was this early, early fantasy writer who greatly influenced C.S. Lewis and Tolkien and stuff.

[13:06] And he was a minister as well, actually. And he said, the principle of hell is, I am my own. I am my own. And that is why we reject the true king.

We belong to God because we're his creation. We belong to the king, but we want to be our own. And that is why when the true king did turn up 2,000 years ago, we beat him and we mocked him. We whipped him and we killed him. Okay, moving to the third stanza. The nature and agenda of this king is kind of fleshed out in this third stanza. Let me read it to you.

I will tell of the decree. This is verse 7. 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.

You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Now a lot of you probably know that Psalm 2 is a coronation psalm.

[14:08] It's a special kind of psalm used when they're kind of installing a king back in the days. And we don't know whether this was used to install King David or one of his descendants. We're not sure, but it's a coronation psalm.

And so the psalm has a few different horizons here, right? It has its immediate historical horizon, which was a coronation psalm, a song sung at the installation of a king that God chose back in the days.

But it has an ultimate meaning as well. And we see that particularly fleshed out in this section because, this is why I say that, no earthly king has ever ruled as described here.

The ends of the earth will be your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron. No earthly king has ever controlled the whole earth or brought justice completely as described here.

So the promises here, the description here is far too great to be just confined to this earthly king, which is why we read it and why the New Testament quotes it so much because it clearly points to King Jesus.

[15:18] And there's a lot more I want to say about that. But we need to move on. Okay, so the second and the third stanza tell us about this true king, Jesus, that God has given him total authority.

The first stanza tells us that we, our hearts, instinctively want to reject this king. And this last stanza here, 10, 11, 12.

Tell us how desperately we need this king. 10, 11, 12. Now therefore, O kings, be wise, be warned. Our 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. This is serious stuff, right? It makes it pretty clear that there is, in terms of your relationship with this king, there is no in between here.

[16:22] You commit yourself to the king or you be destroyed. You kiss the son, using the words of the psalm here. In other words, you humble yourself or you perish.

So friends, the passage says to us, be wise, be smart about this, be warned, understand this completely.

There is no refuge from this king. You cannot run away from this king, hoping that he will ignore you if you leave him alone.

But I want you to look at this last line. It's very, very important. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. There is no refuge from the king, but there is refuge in him.

There is refuge in the king. If you try to be a king and saviour of your own life, it's going to go badly for you. It'll be bad.

[17:26] I say that for a few different reasons. You place yourself under God's judgment, for one, because you're rejecting God's king. Secondly, you'll make a terrible saviour for yourself.

You'll be a terrible king of your own life. For a start, King Jesus wants to forgive you and wants to change your heart.

These are things you cannot do for yourself. So, there is a king.

And the inclination of our hearts is to reject this king, but we desperately need this king. One more thing about this last line as we finish.

I want you to notice that the first word of Psalm 1 is blessed. Blessed is, right?

[18:24] Blessed is he. The last verse of Psalm 2 is blessed are all. Psalm 1 and 2 come right at the beginning of what's called the Psalter.

You know? They have no title. They were put there beside each other for a purpose because they introduce the whole book. They're meant to be read beside each other.

One talking about an individual relationship with God. The other sort of more of a corporate one. In Psalm 1, it talks about how mockers and scoffers, it's talking about them and saying, don't be with these people.

Be with the people of God. Follow God. In Psalm 2, it's talking about this on more of a corporate kind of level. But they are bound by this idea of being blessed.

Blessed is he. Blessed are all who take refuge. And it's trying to tell us something really important, that this is enveloped with blessing.

[19:26] And so the passage finishes wanting us to know, wanting us to know this very acutely, that behind all of the heaviness of this passage, of this psalm, behind the toughness of these words, behind all of that, that grace and forgiveness is available and inspires the whole thing.

Amen.