

Psalm 2

July 1, 2018

Willoughby Heights CanRC

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Read: 2Samuel 7:4-17

Psalm 82

During sermon: Acts 4:23-31; Revelation 19:11-16

Text: Psalm 2

Amen-song: Psalm 2

Dear children of God, brothers and sisters in Christ, and guests, today many in our land are singing “God keep our land, glorious and free”. And maybe also (we certainly will): “Hold our Dominion in Thy loving care”. Thus we recognize God as being higher and greater and mightier than us, the people of the Dominion of Canada. Indeed, God is Ruler Supreme.

Is He? Much of Canadian society and much of its government doesn’t think so. For God’s will is flaunted, God’s Word is ignored.

Recently, Canada’s Supreme Court judged that it’s reasonable for a provincial lawyers’ association to bar graduates of certain law schools from practising law in that province if that law school is deemed to produce graduates who are discriminatory. What will this decision further mean? Could it mean that students of Christian schools will soon no longer be allowed to graduate with a publicly recognized high school diploma as grade 12 students did this past week? Are we facing a future in which Christian education will become irrelevant, or worse, outlawed?

And its not just that Supreme Court decision. There’s the matter of attestations for summer jobs: if you want government money you have to subscribe to the values of the Charter of Rights. Where the irony is that this move would seem to be a violation of that very charter of rights. Then there was the decision in Alberta this past week not to stay the implementation of a law regarding gay-straight alliances at schools, thus denying parents knowledge of what clubs the children God has entrusted to them join.

Our nation is slowly spiralling downwards into uninhibited tolerance and moral anarchy. Humans act as rulers supreme: as long as you don’t hurt others, as long as whatever you do is consensual, it should be fine. Questions of sexual orientation and gender identity, medical assistance in dying, the lack of any laws against abortion, the undermining of marital love and loyalty. God keep our land, glorious and free? The glory is departing, we are becoming more and more enslaved to our own desires.

What is our future?

I was drawn to the second psalm. There is a Jewish tradition that considers Psalm 1 and 2 a single psalm.¹ The two certainly form a couple, indicated especially by the fact that psalm 1 begins with “Blessed” and Psalm 2 ends with “Blessed”. Another pointer is that Psalm 1 speaks of the meditations of the righteous and Psalm 2 speaks of the meditations of the peoples.² Psalms 1 & 2 form a pair. Psalm 1 is a comparison between individuals: the righteous and the wicked. Psalm 2 is a comparison between peoples: the peoples without God and the people of God.

These two psalms form the introduction to the book of psalms. They set the tone. The tone of: life is about the worship of God, service to God. There is wisdom in these psalms.³ Wisdom: that’s about knowing what life is all about and living life properly. Psalm 1 speaks of wisdom for individuals: be a righteous person and not a wicked person: live in obedience to God. Psalm 2 speaks of wisdom for peoples: be an obedient people not a rebellious people: serve God and His anointed King.

There’s quite some debate about the original context and purpose of Psalm 2. We read 2Samuel 7

¹ In Acts 13:33 our psalm is referred to as “the second psalm”. There are also old manuscripts which read “the first psalm”.

² In the ESV the word “meditate” in Psalm 1 and the word “plot” in Psalm 2 translate the same Hebrew word.

³ Interestingly, some other wisdom psalms are also couplets: Psalms 111 & 112, and Psalms 127 & 128.

because some of the things God said to King David are reflected in our Psalm. Is it a coronation psalm: a song to be sung when a new king was crowned? For Solomon's crowning? Could be. However, there are clearly prophetic words in this psalm too, words that point to a reality that no earthly King could match. We know from the New Testament that this psalm wasn't just about Davidic kings ruling from Jerusalem. It is about the great King, Jesus the Christ, ruling from the throne of heaven. The ESV makes this prophetic nature of the psalm obvious by capitalizing the words "anointed" (2:2), "king" (2:6), and "son" (2:7,12).⁴

As prophecy it's a psalm that very speaks directly of and to our situation today. The nations are madly raging. The peoples meditate on vanities. Let us hear the good news of the supreme rule of God and His Anointed King, Jesus the Christ.

Hear the Gospel: The LORD rules supreme through His Anointed. We'll consider: (1) the raging of the peoples; (2) the reaction of God; (3) the reign of Christ; and (4) the rebuke of the Spirit.

1) The raging of the peoples

The world is in uproar, the peoples are rebelling, the governments of the nations are turning against the Ruler Supreme. It's always like that. Think of the age before the Great Flood (Genesis 6), think of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). The early church sang these words, thinking of the Gentiles and the Jews, of Herod and Pilate (Acts 4:23-31). And today, isn't it true today as well?

Realize, this rebellion is not spontaneous, it's not something done on the spur of the moment. It's deliberate. The people are "plotting in vain". The word for "plot" in Psalm 2 translates the same word that in Psalm 1 is translated with "meditate". The righteous man, says Psalm 1(:2), meditates on the law of the LORD, while the raging peoples "meditate on nothingness". Empty and vain thoughts fill the minds of the peoples.

The rulers of the peoples come together. There are summits of world rulers. They gather "to take counsel": to discuss how they might best deal with their concern. Psalm 2:2 is talking about the United Nations, about a G7 summit, about trade talks, about a caucus meeting, parliament, town council. Whatever is happening, whatever is coming, it is planned.

And that's a problem. For in the final analysis, it's just noise, emptiness You see, all those conferences and summits, they are about rebelling against the LORD and His Anointed.

The LORD and His Anointed. Two remarkable names.

The Holy Spirit determined that here God's personal name would be mentioned: "Yahweh", "I am". The ever-present, ever-loyal, always-loving One. It was Yahweh God who made the heavens and the earth (Genesis 2:4). It was Yahweh who inspected the earth in the days of Noah (Genesis 6). It was Yahweh who dispersed the peoples when they sought to make a name for themselves at Babel (Genesis 11). When Moses asked, "whom shall I say sent me?", God told him to say "Yahweh", "I am" (Exo. 3). Pharaoh asked, "Who is Yahweh, that I should obey his voice?" (Exo. 5:2). Well, Pharaoh certainly found out. Yahweh is faithful to His promises in every way and under all circumstances.

And Yahweh is served by His anointed. Boys and girls, when someone becomes king today, they get a crown on their head. When someone became king in Israel, they would have oil poured over their head. We call that "anointing". So, the anointed of the LORD is here a king.⁵

The peoples of the world and their rulers were rebelling against the LORD by rebelling against the one put in place by God to rule on God's behalf.

What is it that the nations and its governments want to do? "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast

⁴ The Hebrew language has no upper-case and lower-case letters; hence capitalization is a matter of interpretation. The NKJV also capitalizes, the RSV and NIV do not. Our *Book of Praise* capitalizes in line with the ESV.

⁵ Though not exclusively: in Hebrews 5:5 the anointing of Psalm is connected to Jesus' priesthood.

away their cords from us.” The words “bonds” and “cords” describe the reins used when riding a donkey, a horse, or a camel. A horse rider holds the reins to control the animal.

The nations and their kings want to rid themselves of the reins. They want to run free. Do their own thing, not God’s thing. The guidelines for life, the law of the LORD, those are the bonds and cords the peoples want to get rid of. The nations want to determine for themselves what is right, and not have God tell them.

They don’t want to serve God. They want to serve their own selfish ends.

There are many examples of this in Scripture. Think of Sennacherib, the Assyrian king who besieged Jerusalem and taunted King Hezekiah (2Kings 18-19). Think of Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, who prided himself in the city and empire he had built (Daniel 4). Or think of the Romans and the Jews, of Herod and Pilate, persecuting the first Christians. Let’s take a Bible and turn to Acts 4, to read how the early church applied these first few verses of Psalm 2 in their time and situation.

Acts 4:23-31

Is the raging and plotting of the nations not the same today?

LGBTQ, Pride, SOGI. Same sex marriages. Cohabitation. Divorce. Promiscuity. “Let’s get rid of the 7th commandment.”

Medical Assistance in Dying. Abortion. Legalisation of recreational drug use. “Let’s get rid of the 6th commandment.”

Schools, not parents, decide what’s best for a child. “Let’s get rid of the 5th commandment.”

A 24/7 economy, it’s all about economy and stay-at-home parents are denied honour. “Let’s get rid of the 4th and 8th commandments.”

It all boils down to “Let’s get rid of the first commandment.” There is no God but humanity; each nation, each culture determine for itself what is right.

We live in a time of upheaval, especially of *moral* upheaval.

But all this is emptiness. It’s vanity. It’s just a raging noise. Like the sound of ocean breakers, from a roar to a hiss as a wave dissipates on a beach. As the nations rage and governments plot, it looks impressive. But the people are as grasshoppers in the eyes of the LORD, the nations are but dust on weigh scales, a drop of water in the ocean (Isaiah 40).

And so it’s ridiculous, this raging, this protest, this rebellion, this attempt to shake off God’s guidelines. Hence the psalm begins with “Why?” It’s a “why” of astonishment. What are the people thinking: they meditate on emptiness!

We look around and see the raging peoples.

2) Let’s now look up and see God’s reaction.

The second stanza of Psalm 2 refers to God in two ways. He “sits in the heavens” and He is “the Lord”.

The expression “sits” here has a connotation of authority, one we also find in Hebrews 1, Revelation 12, and thus in the Apostles’ Creed: “sits at the right hand of God.” Ever noticed, boys and girls, that when kings and presidents rule, they “sit”? Think of President Trump surrounded by his advisors. He’s sitting, the others stand. Likewise, God’s “sitting” is a “sitting on the throne”. And God’s throne is not among the thrones of earth. God is far above the thrones of the earth: He sits in heaven, He is enthroned on high.

The designation “Lord” conveys the same idea. Note that this time the word is not in all capital letters.⁶ Here, in the original, we don’t have the personal name for God: Yahweh. Here we have a designation that refers to His position. He is lord, He is master, He is ruler.

Ruler Supreme. Those words convey what Psalm 2:4 is saying. The Lord who is enthroned in heaven. Ruler Supreme.

⁶ Our *Book of Praise* is thus not accurate here.

What's His reaction? Is God shocked by the rebellion of people on earth? Is God taken aback? Will God cajole the peoples back into line? Placate the people for fear of losing them even further? Is God like so many politicians today: pandering to people to win as votes?

No. God's reaction is shocking, so shocking that some even tone it down to make it a bit more palatable. But you can't. "He laughs them to scorn: He holds them in derision. Then He will speak in wrath and indignation and all their host will He terror fill."⁷ God laughs it off. It's silliness. It's emptiness, vanity, ridiculous.

You know why? It's because God has His own King. God is in heaven, above the nations. And He has taken measures. He has His own King, on Zion, Gods holy hill, the place that is dedicated to God's service, the place that promulgates God's law.

Already during the times of the Old Testament God proved how powerful His king is. David and Solomon were mighty kings in their time. Hezekiah: Assyria figured Judah would fall like the Israelites and Philistines had. But no, God annihilated the Assyrian army and shortly after the failed siege of Jerusalem Sennacherib himself was assassinated (2Kings 19:35-37). Among the kings of the earth, the anointed of the LORD in Zion stood out.

Of course, David and Solomon and Hezekiah but foreshadowed the supreme anointed of the Lord. I'm thinking of Jesus the Christ. The Hebrew word for "Christ" is "Messiah". And both those words mean "anointed". The King whom the Lord enthroned in heaven has put in place is none other than Jesus the Christ. Now, the Zion from which He rules is not an earthly one. It's a heavenly Zion, it's the heavenly Jerusalem, it's a rule from the throne directly at God's right hand (cf. Hebrews 1:3b). But the earthly aspect remains in that the Christ is fully human, in all ways like the kings and rulers of the earth, but greater. He is King of kings and Lord of lords.

3) We're drifting into our third consideration: the reign of Christ.

In verse 7 it is the King appointed by God to rule from Zion, God's holy hill, who takes the word. A question is, who exactly is He?

He says that Yahweh declares Him to be His Son. So the king is the Son of Yahweh. What does that mean? Do we take this literally? Or just figuratively? We can certainly take it figuratively. The implications of texts like 2Samuel 7:14 (cf. Psalm 89:26-27) is that David could be called "the son of God". And it certainly would be figurative given that God said: "Today I have begotten you." You won't say that as the natural parent of a child. But it's the kind of thing adoptive parents might say: "Today we have become your parents."

Still, in the flow of history it's become clear that there is a much greater depth to these words. Hebrews 1:(2-3) speaks of "[God's] Son, whom God has appointed the heir of all things, ... who sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." Hebrews 5(:5) refers the words "You are my Son, today I have begotten you" directly to the Christ.

Now, what's interesting is that where Jesus Christ is concerned, the words "You are my Son, today I have begotten you" have multiple applications. First, the words apply when Christ officially entered His ministry. Think of the Father's speaking at Christ's baptism (Matthew 3:17). Think of the Father's speaking on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5). However, we can also back up to the human conception and birth of the Christ. Said the angel Gabriel to Mary: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy – the Son of God." (Luke 1:35). Here it is clear that God is indeed the natural Father of Jesus Christ. But it extends even further. The apostle John describes the coming of the Christ into the world in this way: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. ...

⁷ *Book of Praise.*

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only-begotten Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:1,2,14).

In three different ways Jesus is the Son of God, begotten of the Father.

With respect to His appointment. This He shared with all the Davidic kings before Him.

With respect to His human birth. In this He is unique.

With respect to His divine nature. In this He is unique as well.

In every way Christ fits description of God’s Holy King. Thus the apostle Paul once said in a Jewish synagogue: “We bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising⁸ Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’” (Acts 13:32-33)

What is God’s anointed king granted? The rule of the whole world with a might and power that cannot be challenged.

Again, if Psalm 2 is just applied to the Davidic kings, there’s something odd here. For never did David and Solomon rule literally to the ends of the earth. Never were all the nations their inheritance. Their empires were large, but not all encompassing.

Yet that’s what God promised. And that became a reality with respect to Christ. Said Gabriel to Mary on behalf of God: “I will give Him the throne of His father David.” That’s the throne of 2Samuel 7. That’s the throne of Psalm 2. With the enthronement of Jesus Christ, the promise made to David, the prophecy of Psalm 2, reached complete fulfilment. Thus in the Revelation Jesus the Christ is proclaimed to be, not just a king and lord, but King *of* kings and Lord *of* lords! (Revelation 19:16)

And the rule of Jesus the Christ is firm. The imagery shifts, from bonds and cords, to a rod of iron for which pottery is no match. Several times in the book of Revelation is the rule of Christ described with a reference to this rod of iron. Thus Revelation 12(:5): “She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, and her child was caught up to God and His throne.” Let’s take a Bible for a moment to read from Revelation 19.

Revelation 19:11-16

So what exactly that this rule by a rod of iron look like? How does Christ shatter the opposition of the nations and their kings?⁹ Revelation 19 hints at this when it places the “sword of Christ’s mouth” parallel to “the rod of iron”. We find the same thing happen in Isaiah 11. There we read this prophecy: “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him ... and He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall kill the wicked.” (Isaiah 11:1-2a, 4).

The sword of Christ’s mouth, the rod of iron, the rod of His mouth, the breath of His lips. The rule of Christ is exercised by the proclamation of the Gospel. It is exercised by declaring the absolute authority of God, the authority granted to the Christ, and calling upon the kings and rulers, upon the nations and peoples, to hear God and to obey His will. The rod of iron is the preaching. It demonstrates the weakness of human power. It exposes the folly of human wisdom. It proves the vanity of human striving.

Psalm 2 makes this clear as well, for in verses 10-12 we see the rod of iron in action.

⁸ Because of verse 34, this “raising” is considered to refer to Christ’s resurrection. However, in verse 32 the word “raise” is to be understood as “raise a king”, referring to the whole span of Christ’s life from conception and birth to ascension.

⁹ As the ESV footnote to Psalm 2:9 makes clear, putting different vowels with the Hebrew word translated “break” (or, more appropriately, “shatter”) yields the word “to shepherd, to rule”. It’s that word which we find in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, and thus quoted in Revelation (though in Rev. 2:27 both the words “rule” and “break in pieces” are found). The difference between the two should not be pressed. Rather, it should be recognized that the guidance of a shepherd also involves disciplining sheep and warding off those who attack the sheep.

4) We come to our last consideration: the rebuke of the Spirit

The rebellion of the earth's peoples, the scolding reaction of God, the rule by Christ, it leads to a rebuke and a call to repentance. Stop meditating emptiness but be wise, understand you kings! Stop your rebellious plotting but be warned, you rulers! A direct appeal to leaders like Trump and Putin and Jinping, to Prime Minister Trudeau and premier Horgan and our mayors, to all elected and appointed officials, I'm thinking also of judges in our judicial system. Be wise! Be warned! It's not our everchanging human thoughts on right and wrong that make for happiness. It's the bonds and cords, it's the reins, it's the guidelines given us by God and proclaimed to us by His anointed King, Jesus Christ. For this is *God's* world. Not *our* world but *God's* world.

Thus the world is to be called upon to serve the LORD with fear and rejoice in God with trembling. That may sound odd, may not make sense to us. Serve *with fear*, rejoice *with trembling*? Yes. For hear what the Spirit says.

Serve God means respecting the Son. "Kiss the Son": to kiss a king was to show reverence to that king. If there's no reverence, one meets with the anger of Christ, a wrath that is quickly kindled, and a king, a nation will perish in the way. Perish: there will be destruction. A nation will cease to exist, a king will come to his downfall. Ignoring God, giving in to self-centred desires, giving in to anti-Biblical tolerance, it leads to self-destruction. How often have we not seen it happen in the course of history? Nations come and go, empires rise and fall. But the Kingdom of Christ continues to expand throughout the world as foretold already in Daniel 2. Christ continues to gather, defend, and preserve the Church by His Spirit and Word.

Thus note the conclusion: Blessed are all who take refuge in Him. In Christ one is safe. Safe from the wrath of God that comes because of sin. Protected under the guidance of God. Ready for a Kingdom where all meditate day and night on God's guidelines, God's formula for love and loyalty. The only formula for true bliss.

Hear it well: The LORD rules supreme through His anointed.

We live in a free nation, and for this we are grateful. But we're seeing the foundations shake. There's a defiance of God in our world. Traditionally Christian nations are losing their identity. So much so that Christians within a nation like ours are finding themselves pushed to the fringes of society, sidelined, ignored, and in some cases, our actions and even voicing our opinions are criminalized.¹⁰

People of God, don't be disheartened. God ridicules the plotting of the nations and the conspiring of world rulers. Jesus Christ is King and He rules with a rod of iron, He does battle with the sword of His mouth. Fight for Him. Do not be afraid in the battle, a battle for hospices to be places of palliative care, a battle for hospitals to be places of birth, a battle for families where a man and a woman become one flesh, a safe nest where children are raised, a battle for the institutions which God created in the beginning, and which God upholds through His law. A battle against human selfishness and human supremacy, a battle for love and loyalty, true love, true loyalty.

A battle, in which Jesus Christ has already won the decisive victory.

Beloved, the better day is coming. Always stand on guard.

Amen.

¹⁰ Our Reformed schools in Alberta will likely lose funding as they refuse to comply with the Gay-Straight Alliance law. I also think of Bubble-Zone legislation.