

Psalm 2

We live in challenging times. We live in times where the temptation is just to bury your head in the sand and forget about the troubles of the world. It seems like evil is on the march and the good people, at least most of them, are running scared. These are the most troubled times I have ever seen. But it seems like I said the same thing 5 years ago, 3 years ago, 18 months ago and its even more true today.

And lots of folks wonder, “What is Jesus up to?”

These are difficult times—but it is a perfect time for the Psalms. The Psalms are filled with praise, prayer and pain—all of it laid at the feet of the Lord in a bold, in a fantastic reliance on God’s power and promise.

John Calvin said he called the Psalms “An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul.” He said

The Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life of all the griefs, sorrow ,fears, doubts, emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated...here the prophets themselves lay open their inmost thoughts and affections.

The Psalms ask the questions we dare not ask. The Psalms say what we dare not think. The Psalms are real and raw with all our humanity on display.

And Psalm 2 deals with the with the universal question of the persistence of evil and the powerful who choose to practice evil and put themselves at odds with God’s eternal law.

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 away their cords from us.”

Psalm 2:1-3

The Bible asks “Why?” 34 times in the Psalms—more than in every five Psalms. It’s a common question. It’s often the first question we ask. We ask “Why?” when something is wrong with the world. We ask “Why?” something is unrighteous or unjust, when it does not align with what we believe God should do.

It can be a painful question. I’ve asked “Why?” at more than one funeral. I’ve asked “Why?” when my world is falling apart.

But “Why?” is a very important question because it is the question of faith. Asking “Why?” assumes there is a reason, “Why” assumes someone is in control and in charge. A world in which there is a “Why” is a world with no purpose. “Why” assumes there is an end in mind. A world where there is no “Why” is truly a frightening place.

Psalm 2 begins with the question “Why?”

And the question is, “Why do men and women, why do pagan people, heathen people (which is what the Hebrew word translated as ‘nations’ means) have the gall, or we might say ‘chutzpah’ to do something so fruitless as to plot against God and pit themselves against God in what is certain to be vain, fruitless, futile gesture?”

As a kid, my parents tried to feed me liver a few times. To this day I cannot understand why anyone would ever voluntarily eat an organ—especially one that tastes like spongy, moldering sandpaper. So every time I refused to eat it—even a bite. But this was not about food as much as it was a test of wills. And every time I sat at kitchen table until 9 PM defying parents’ authority in a battle I knew I was going to lose—a battle that always ended up in me rather than eating something warm that tasted like a spongy, moldering sandpaper, I ate something that tasted like cold, spongy, moldering sandpaper.

It was a power struggle that I lost. I wanted autonomy, to control of my life but I was not able to get it.

This is why human beings, heathen, pagan peoples rage and resist God. We want control. We want to be in charge. Some work against the Lord. Some want to cast off God’s law that feel like chains and bonds, cords and shackles—that we believe imprison us.

And only do we resist the Lord God, the first person of the Trinity—there is also a direct reference here to Jesus Christ, who is God’s anointed. The nations also rage against Jesus. That’s why this world rejected Jesus when He made it His home. That is why saying “Jesus is Lord” in controversial even today. To people who not know Jesus, His yoke is grueling and the burden of obeying Him is heavy.

Is God threatened by people who resist His yoke? Does our resistance imperil Jesus? Is He challenged by people who resist His authority? In a word, “No.”

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.”

Psalm 2:4-6

Is a boot threatened by an ant? Is a bugzapper threatened by a mosquito? Is a flyswatter threatened by a fly?

The answer is no. And this is even more true for the Lord God who laughs at tiny, insignificant men shaking their fists and the heavens and raging against His reign and His authority. In fact, God laughs at the sheer ludicrousness of the act. God even mocks them. There is a great story in the Old Testament, the book of First Kings, where a prophet of the Lord, a man named Elijah, battled on his own, took on all by himself, 450 prophets of a false Canaanite God named Baal. They held a contest to see which God would answer their prayer. The 450 prophets of Baal wept, wailed and moaned and cut themselves in an act of ritual sacrifice to get their God to start a simple fire on dry wood. They made fools of themselves for about six hours and by lunchtime were exhausted.

Their God did nothing. Nothing happened. There was not even a spark, not even a wisp of grey smoke. And Elijah mocked them in one of the great all-time flexes in history. If Elijah had tweeted this, it would have gone viral:

“Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.”

2 Kings 18:27

So, in other words, Elijah said, “I am sure your god will answer you. He is probably just taking walk or napping on the couch or he might even be in the bathroom! Just be patient. He’s busy.”

There is nothing better, at least for me, than a good old-fashioned, theological flex by a full-bearded, robe and sandaled prophet!

God belly laughs at, mocks these tiny, skinny-armed, baggy-pants, one bullet in their shirt-pocket clowns who believe they can oppose the King of the Universe. And more than that, God promises, “Not only are you people so ridiculous that you give me a chortle—I am going to put my Son, my Anointed One on the throne of the cosmos. I am going to establish His Kingdom on earth forever. He is going to rule you from the holiest hill in the world. Let’s see how you do with Him.” **Psalm 2:7-9:**

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.”

The nations are Jesus’ heritage. The ends of the earth are His possession. It all belongs to Jesus—every bit. There is not a single, solitary square inch of this earth over which Jesus does not rightfully claim, “Mine!” And it does not go well for those who oppose Him.

The last non-Christian Roman Emperor was named Julian the Apostate. He reigned from 331 AD to 363 AD. With a name like Julian the Apostate, you know he was not a great guy. Julian the Righteous sounds like someone you would maybe like to know. Julian the Apostate—that’s a hard pass!

The story goes that when things were going well for Julian the Apostate, when all was right with Rome and his rule over it, that he pointed his dagger to heaven in defiance of Jesus whom he derisively called “The Galliean” referring to the humble land of Jesus’ childhood and ministry.

But when Julian was trying to expand the Roman empire, his empire he was mortally wounded in battle. And with his last breath he threw his bloodied hands into the air and cried out, “Thou hast conquered, o Thou Galliean!”

It does not go well for those who oppose the God from Galilee!

In Revelation Chapter 19 there is a terrifying description of God’s Anointed, the Word of God who became flesh, the Lion of Judah, the Lamb of God, Jesus—at least for those who oppose Him:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Revelation 19:11-17

Some think of Jesus as a long-haired, robe-wearing, bearded carpenter, meek and mild, spouting poetry, passing out fish and bread to people sitting on tall blades of green grass—just a little to the Republican side of a hippie. Actually, Jesus is terrifying to those who resist His reign, to those who insist on doing what is right in their own eyes. The Kings of the earth—the mightiest powers who have ever ruled throughout the broad scope of history—the Greeks, Egyptians, the Romans, the Aztecs, the dynasties of China, the Huns, the Ottoman Empire, the Nazis, the Marxist regimes of the 20th Century—have all risen and fell because they opposed God. And the same will be true for any nation that does not allow Jesus to reign, for any people for whom He is not King of Kings and Lord of Lords—even this one.

King Jesus will break them with a rod of iron—every single one. Jesus does not share His throne.

And it is up to every woman and every man to determine if Jesus will be Lord of their or if they will be lost. Psalm 2:10-12

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.

In knowing and serving Jesus as Lord, there is joy and rejoicing. But there can be no real joy without reverence, without knowing who He is, without holy and healthy fear. A preacher once said:

Fear without joy is torment and joy without fear is presumption.

And we should never underestimate joy. This whole world pursues joy. We will sell our soul for things we believe will give us even joy's cheap counterfeit—happiness. But we can have more than joy—if we hold Jesus in His proper place, as Lord.

We can have intimacy with God, amazing familiarity and closeness with our Maker and the Maker of all things. We can be closer to Jesus, the Lord God than to any human being through the Holy Spirit who literally lives in us.

In that intimacy with God we find unmitigated shelter, security, sanctuary, safe-keeping, assurance and refuge.

And that in that is amazing blessing. "Blessed are all who take refuge in Him," Psalm 2 promises.

Those who take refuge in Him are even blessed when the powers of this world, the kings of the earth align themselves against them.

And if we believe that the default position for any king of the earth who doesn't know Jesus is to not align themselves against Jesus, we are naïve about human nature.

And if we believe that default position for any average human being—and lets face it we all make ourselves the king of our own tiny little empire of dirt—is not to align ourselves against Jesus, we are naïve about the state of our own soul.

The quickest way to tell if we hold Jesus as Lord or ourselves is our fears about the world. I didn't say concerns about the state of the world. I didn't say criticisms of questions or even righteous anger about what we see but our fears. We should ask questions about this world. We should have righteous anger.

But if our fears or if our "Whys?" overwhelm our joy, or cause to hate or have wrath—then we may be the one shaking our fist at God, setting ourselves against Jesus and trying burst our bonds and break our cords from God's grace and love.

It's time to stop.

Serve the Lord with reverence.

Cultivate joy through following God's Word.

Be intimate with Jesus.

And take refuge in Him.

Why would we not?