

Truth for Today

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Meditations in the Psalms: Psalm 2:1-12 - A proper world view

Let's start by reading Psalm 2. I'm going to read from the English Standard Version. *"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.' 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.' 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 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."* (Psalm 2:1-12, English Standard Version)

So there we have Psalm 2. Now, what does this psalm tell us about a proper world view? And in fact what do we mean by a "world view"? Let's start with the second question first. The Oxford Dictionary of English defines a world view as "a particular philosophy of life or conception of the world". With this meaning in mind, we can consider how Psalm 2 gives us a proper world view. Actually, it gives us God's world view, so to speak - it outlines clearly how God intends to establish the rule of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, over the earth. Now of course the psalm was originally written well before the Lord Jesus was revealed on earth. However, it definitely speaks about the Messiah - the Messiah being the Anointed One of God. When we come to the New Testament, we find that this psalm is quoted seven times, always referring to the Lord Jesus (Acts 4:25-26; Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5, 5:5; Revelation 2:27; 12:5; 19:15). We shall look at some of these quotations as we go through this Psalm. So to sum up so far, we can say at the outset that Psalm 2 gives us God's view of the world in reference to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who will reign according to God's purpose and decree.

The psalm starts abruptly with *"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"* (Psalm 2:1-2) When I read these words, I tend to hear in my mind the tune set to them in Handel's 'Messiah'. There are quite a few passages in the Bible which bring Handel's 'Messiah' to mind! However, the question asked in Psalm 2 is a solemn one. Why do the nations rage against God? We get an answer to this in the first direct quote of Psalm 2 in the New Testament. Let me read Acts 4:24-28: *"And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, 'Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, "Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed" - for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place'"* (Acts 4:24-28, English Standard Version).

In Acts 4:24-28, the believers clearly understood that the Lord's Anointed was Jesus of Nazareth, and that in essence the whole world - as represented by Herod, King in Galilee, Pontius Pilate, the representative of the Roman imperial power, and the people of Israel - so the whole world, I say, was gathered together against Him. So the rage and counsel against the Lord and His Anointed are explained in the New Testament as being enmity against the Lord Jesus. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that the Christians understood this psalm to be one of David's, but they recognised that it formed part of the Word of God as given by the Holy Spirit, because they said *"who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit."*

But why this enmity? Is not Jesus spoken of as One who went about doing good? Acts 10:38 tells us *"how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him."* Acts 10:39 tells us about the enmity against Him: *"And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree."* The reason for the enmity is given in Psalm 2:3 *"Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us."* The thing is, the claims of God and of the Lord Jesus are intolerable to the natural man. It reminds me of Luke 19:14 *"We do not want this man to reign over us."*

Now it is easy to point the finger at those in history, but we must be careful to look at ourselves. The Apostle Paul says in Romans 8:7-8, *“For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”* Unless the Lord works in me in sovereign, saving grace, I cannot please God. I may try to please Him in my own way, but like Cain in Genesis 4:1-15, it won’t be acceptable to God. I must accept that I am a sinner, and that my natural, sinful self is indeed in rebellion against God. But the wonderful truth is that God loves us, and that He loves us even when we were enemies! (see Romans 5:10) Just think what the Apostle Paul says in Romans 5:6-11: *“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person - though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die - but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”*

The Apostle Paul’s statement that the mind of the flesh cannot please God and will not submit to His law (see Romans 8:8) may seem strange and even harsh to some, but God knows what He is saying. I certainly know from my own life that it is only by God’s grace and His work in my life that I am learning to love Him. There is a very interesting incident in history that shows how otherwise reasonable and respected persons can show enmity to the Lord Jesus and His people. I remember back at school in Latin classes we had to translate a letter from Pliny the Younger. Now this Pliny the Younger, he was the governor of Bithynia and Pontus during the time of the Roman Emperor Trajan. Pliny asked the Emperor for advice on how to deal with Christians. I’m quoting now from *Miller’s Church History* (Miller, A: *Miller’s Church History*, ISBN: 9780720801118), which includes a translation of Pliny’s letter to Trajan. Part of it reads as follows: “In the meantime this has been my method with respect to those who were brought before me as Christians: if they pleaded guilty, I interrogated them - a second and a third time - with the menace of capital punishment. In case of obstinate perseverance, I ordered them to be executed.”

A bit further on the letter reads like this: “The whole of the crime or error of the Christians lay in this - they were accustomed on a certain day to meet before daylight, and to sing among themselves a hymn to Christ, as a god; and to bind themselves by an oath not to commit any wickedness; not to be guilty of theft, or robbery, or adultery; never to falsify their word, nor to deny a pledge committed to them when called upon to return it. When these things were performed, it was their custom to separate, and then to come together again to a harmless meal, of which they partook in common without any disorder; but this last practice they have ceased to attend to since the publication of my edict, by which according to your commands, I prohibited assemblies.” So there we have part of Pliny’s letter.

The Emperor Trajan replied to Pliny, commending his approach. He told Pliny that he should not hunt down Christians, but that if anyone was brought before him and convicted, he should be capitally punished. Miller, in his *Church History*, says that Pliny was naturally a wise, candid and humane man, and yet we see him here happy to execute Christians who by his own admission had done no harm! As a schoolboy, I remember feeling quite annoyed with Pliny when we had translated that letter! What had these Christians done to deserve this treatment? Now as the Apostle Paul knew, the Lord Jesus considers such things as done against Himself. Paul, as Saul of Tarsus, himself had persecuted Christians (see Acts 8:3, 9:1), and he had agreed with the stoning of the first martyr, Stephen (Acts 7:54-8:1). On the road to Damascus, the Lord Jesus asked Paul, *“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”* (Acts 9:4).

Now we should ask, what does God think about this enmity against His Son? We can answer in two ways. On the one hand God is *“not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance”* as we read in 2 Peter 3:9. Great grace was shown to Saul of Tarsus, who became the Apostle Paul, as we have just considered (see Acts 9:1-9). And earlier we thought about Romans 5:6-11 where we read: *“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son”* (Romans 5:10). On the other hand though, any approach to thwart God’s purposes concerning His Son will fail. Psalm 2:4 tells us: *“He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.”* It is a solemn thing to think of God laughing at our plans! Ultimately, God’s patience will end: *“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 2:5-6). The phrase *“as for Me”* is worth noting. In Psalm 2:1-2 we read of raging, plotting, setting themselves and taking counsel together, but God says, *“as for Me”*. His plans and His counsels will stand. What He has decreed must take place!

Moving onto Psalm 2:7, we hear as it were the Lord Jesus speaking. God has said in Psalm 2:6 that He has set His King on Zion. In Psalm 2:7-9, the King Himself now repeats that decree: He proclaims what God has said to Him, that is, *“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 proclamation *“You are my Son, today I have begotten you”* is quoted directly three times in the New Testament, and these references are Acts 13:33, Hebrews 1:5, and Hebrews 5:5. In addition, God the Father spoke to the Lord

Jesus in similar terms at His baptism, as we can see in Luke 3:22, and about Him at the transfiguration, as we can see in Matthew 17:5.

Let's look at the three direct quotes that I mentioned first:

1. Acts 13:33. Here the Apostle Paul speaks of Jesus having been raised up as a Saviour. Note that in Acts 13:33 the word "raising" Jesus refers to Him being raised up as a Saviour, that is, at His birth (see Matthew 1:21), not being raised from the dead.
2. Hebrews 1:5. Here the quote is to help us understand the greatness of the Lord Jesus as the Son of God, the One who created the world, upholds the universe by His power, and has been appointed as heir of all things.
3. Hebrews 5:5. Here the emphasis is on the Lord Jesus being appointed as our great High Priest.

Psalm 2:8-9 continue the decree that God has made: *"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."* This is also quoted three times in the New Testament, interestingly and fittingly each time in the book of Revelation, which is the book that tells us about end times. The references are Revelation 2:27, 12:5, and 19:15.

The first quote, in Revelation 2:27, forms part of the Lord Jesus' words to the Church at Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-29). I'll read Revelation 2:25-27: *"Only hold fast what you have until I come. The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father."* This quote is highly instructive, because it tells us when God's decree is to be enacted, and that is when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to the earth. *"Only hold fast what you have until I come"*, He says (Revelation 2:25). It is incredible to think of the grace and love of the Lord Jesus that He is willing to share the great honour and right that He has with His own: *"to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces"* (Revelation 2:27). It also shows us that the Lord Jesus Himself clearly applies the decree of Psalm 2 to Himself: *"even as I myself have received authority from my Father"* (Revelation 2:26), so that gives us confidence in understanding Psalm 2 to be about Him.

The other quotes in Revelation that I mentioned are Revelation 12:5, which speaks of the Lord Jesus as the One who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, and then Revelation 19:15, which is the prophetic Scripture that shows us this actually happening.

Now we come to the practical part of this talk. If Psalm 2 gives us God's world view, concerning His Son, then what should we do about it? Psalm 2:10-12 give us God's advice. Let me read them again: *"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 these verses we see solemn warnings from God, but also a gracious invitation. I remember being at a Bible study in a church some years ago, and a gentleman made the comment that in times of conflict, you would hardly expect a country to give their secret plans to their enemy! But God has revealed to us what He plans to do, in His Word, and this tells us that God is not our enemy! We can once again think about that verse in Romans 5:10: *"For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son."* Probably the best known verse in the Bible, John 3:16, tells us that *"God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"*, and it is thrilling to think that these were the words of the Son Himself, the Lord Jesus, who first spoke them to Nicodemus when he came to see the Lord Jesus at night (see John 3:1-21).

So God gives us His world view, and He lets us know His plans, so that we have time and opportunity to align ourselves with Him and with His plans. Now is the opportunity to embrace God's Son, and to recognise Him for who He is. The book of Revelation contains many fearful passages of what will happen to this world and what will happen to those who refuse to accept the Lordship of Jesus Christ. But God has written these things so that we have the opportunity to turn to Him now by accepting His Son, and by trusting in what His Son has done for us, by dying on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. As the psalm ends, *"Blessed are all who take refuge in him"* (Psalm 2:12).

Now if we know the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, what practical lessons can we draw from Psalm 2? Well, I am sure we could think of many applications, but for now, I would like to quickly consider three things as we come to the end of this study. These three things are patience, confidence, and love.

First, patience. We can have, and should have, patience because we know that God has decreed that the Lord Jesus Christ will return and reign. Let me read James 5:7-11: *"Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those*

blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful."

We can also be confident. God's promises will come to pass. Think of how the Lord Jesus Himself has confidence in His Father's promise, as we saw earlier when I read Revelation 2:27: *"even as I myself have received authority from my Father."*

Finally, love - love to God, and love to our fellow men and women. We are told in our psalm to *"kiss the Son"* (Psalm 2:12), and that *"blessed are all who take refuge in him"* (Psalm 2:12). We should show our love to God who has shown us His plans and given us the opportunity to be reconciled to Him through the death and resurrection of His Son. We should also show love to our fellow men and women, as being followers of the One *"who went about doing good"* (Acts 10:38), and where we have opportunity by telling them of the Lord Jesus and the need to be saved by Him. So here we have a few simple thoughts about Psalm 2 which I hope will be encouraging and also helpful in our Christian pathway.

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