

Psalm 2

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[0 : 0 0] King Jesus is on the throne. What are the implications of this reality for mission, for the mission that we as God's people have been called to undertake? As I made reference to in introducing our reading this evening, this morning we were considering Mark's account of Jesus' baptism. We read of how when Jesus came up out of the Jordan, the heavens were torn open, the Spirit descended like a dove upon Him, and a voice from heaven declared, You are my Son, whom I love, and whom I am well pleased. God identified Jesus as His Son, and by employing the words of Psalm 2 and verse 7 that we've read, He also identified Jesus as His promised messianic king. And Jesus, as He embarks on His public ministry, is very conscious of His own kingship. The good news that He preached in Galilee, the very first reference that we have to the message that He preached, was a message concerning the coming of God's kingdom. The kingdom of God is near, lay at the heart of the message that He proclaimed. Having completed His kingly mission, having enjoyed the Father's vindication by being raised from the dead, Jesus ascended to heaven. He was exalted to the highest place to occupy His throne. But before He did so, He gave His disciples instructions concerning

His inheritance, the inheritance that we read of in Psalm 2, I will make the nations your inheritance. And the instructions that He gave to His disciples concerning His inheritance as God's appointed king are found in the words of what we call the Great Commission. We can remind ourselves what Jesus said on that occasion. In Matthew chapter 28, if we read from verse 16, Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw Him, they worshipped Him, but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. I'm the king. And as king, I've been granted, I've been given by the Father all authority. Given that that is so, therefore go and make disciples of all nations. In Mark's version of the Great Commission, we read, Go into all the world, all the world, my world, my inheritance, my possession. Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always to the very end of the age. What I want us to do this evening is to consider that commission that we've been given, that mission that we have to perform, but to consider it in the light of what Psalm 2 tells us about our king, about the one who has so commissioned us, about his inheritance into which we are to go. He's sending us into the world, and the world is his inheritance. And so when we read in Psalm 2 matters that relate to the king and to the nations and to God's attitude to the nations and God's message for the nations. These are reality, these are truths that apply to us in our mission as disciples, as ambassadors of King Jesus.

So let's think about this psalm, and it will be really a fleeting overview of the whole psalm. There's much in the psalm, and we won't detain ourselves, I trust, in much detail, but an overview of the psalm, but looked at in that light. First of all, where does King Jesus send us to? Well, we've read the words of the Great Commission that was given by Jesus to his disciples, to his subjects, if you wish. We are to go into all the world. We are to make disciples of all nations.

We do so to claim the nations for our King. On what authority does Jesus command us to go and claim the nations for himself? Well, we read in Matthew how Jesus himself identifies on what authority he is sending his disciples. He declares that he has been given all authority in heaven and earth, given this authority by the Father as God's appointed and anointed king.

The nations are Jesus' inheritance as king. And of course, this is exactly what God had already announced in the words of our psalm. In Psalm 2 and in verse 7, we read, I will proclaim the decree of the Lord. He said to me, in the context of the psalm as it was originally written, is King David remembering what God had said to him as king. Of course, these words are then fulfilled ultimately in Jesus. He said to me, God said to me, you are my son. Today I have become your father. Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.

[6 : 22] We see how this promise couldn't possibly have been fulfilled and wasn't fulfilled in the person of King David. David's kingdom extended greatly. It was the golden age of Israel. The borders of Israel extended to an extent that had never been seen before and were never seen subsequent to. But they never extended in the manner described in the psalm. Clearly, this is not fulfilled in David, but it is fulfilled in David's greater son, in King Jesus. The nations that we are sent to, the nations that you are sent to, the nations that in God's providence have in great measure come to our own doorstep, even in the city of Aberdeen, even in the city of Aberdeen, are His nations. They belong to our King.

And as we engage in mission, as we speak to others concerning Jesus, we are to do so in that conviction, in that assurance, in that confidence that we're not trespassing. We're not trespassing in people's personal space. We're certainly not trespassing if in God's providence we're unable to go out with our country and cross frontiers and take the message of the gospel. No, we are going into our King's territory to claim it for our King. So, the nations are the inheritance of King Jesus, but what do these nations given to Jesus, His inheritance, what do they make of King Jesus?

You might imagine in a lovely world that they'd be delighted to belong to King Jesus, that they would gladly acknowledge King Jesus, but of course that is not the reality. It's not the reality that we observe, and it's not the reality that is presented to us in the psalm. The first three verses of the psalm were told what the nations make of the king, what they made of King David when he was king over Israel, and what they make of King Jesus. What do we read there at the beginning of the psalm?

Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against His anointed one, against His king.

Let us break their chains, they say, and throw off their fetters. The nations don't recognize the kingship of Jesus. Their default position is one of opposition. It's ever been so, and it ought not to surprise us nor discourage us. We wish it were otherwise, but that's the way it is, and it has ever been so. What can we learn or what can we draw about the nature of this opposition from our psalm?

[9 : 24] I think the opposition is characterized by two features, maybe by more, but two that I want to draw out. First of all, it's characterized by a frantic desire for autonomy. We see that especially in verse 3, and we'll come back in a moment to see what that means, but let me just say what the other characteristic of this opposition is, and then we'll think of them both. The second characteristic is that it's an opposition that involves a futile scheming against the king. Why do the nations conspire, and the people's plot in vain? A frantic desire for autonomy and a futile scheming against the king.

Now, this desire for autonomy, this scheming against the king, was present in David's day when the psalm was first composed. David is writing the psalm presumably in those circumstances.

The psalm is a psalm, it would seem, that was written sometime after his coronation. Historically, when he was crowned as king, there was very little opposition, such was his power. But of course, circumstances changed, and circumstances developed where there was opposition, and he writes concerning this opposition in his psalm. But this opposition was present not only in David's day, but it's also the very opposition that confronted Jesus and the early church. And we say that on the authority of the Bible itself, where this psalm is employed to describe that historical opposition to Jesus and the early church. Let's just notice where we find that in Acts chapter 4 and in verse 24.

This is a psalm, actually, that we find quoted on a number of occasions in the New Testament, the occasion in Mark that we were looking at this morning, but also on this occasion. In Acts chapter 4, the psalm is quoted indeed more extensively than in Mark's gospel. And let's just read what it says.

Acts chapter 4, reading from verse 24. And the context of this is the opposition that the early church were experiencing at the hands of the authorities. And we'll pick up the reading at verse 24.

[11 : 48] When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. Sovereign Lord, they said, you made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David.

Curiously, it's only because of this reference in Acts that we can confidently identify David as the author in the psalms itself. He's not identified. It would have been a reasonable conclusion that it was David, but only here are we told explicitly that it was David. But then what is the psalm that is quoted? Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers gather against the Lord and against His anointed one. And then we read how that psalm is identified as prophesying what actually happened to Jesus. Indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed. That's exactly what happened to Jesus. The nations conspired against Him. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Indeed, in that verse, we already get a hint of what we're going to look at in the psalm as to God's attitude towards that opposition. So, this opposition is one we can identify in history. David endured it as king.

Jesus endured it, and it continues, of course, to this day all over the world. God's people and God's king is opposed. It's the default position of the nations, and indeed of those who live within the nations. If we think of our own nation, we thank God as believers don't endure the kind of violent persecution and opposition that many believers do, and we're grateful to God for that. But as we observe our nation, we form a part of, we can see, we can observe before us how as a nation we are frantically seeking to break off the chains and fetters of God's law, of the king's commandments.

We insist on our autonomy to do as we please, to live as we please, to die as we please, and when we please. We see this in two areas of national life in particular, just to illustrate this frantic seeking after autonomy. We see it in the area of sexual ethics and marriage. We cast off the fetters of what God has determined is good and right and fitting. We say, we don't care about that.

We'll do as we see fit. We'll live as we please. We know best. We will decide what we do in that area in particular. The only criteria that is of relevance is that of consent. If adults consent to do as they please, they can do as they please. We cast off God's chains and fetters as we see them. But we see this also in another area, in the area of the sanctity of life. In many ways, this is more chilling and disturbing. Any notion of protection for a child in the womb is trumped by the demand for personal autonomy. It's my body. I'll do with my body as I please, regardless of whether that is a piece of nonsense as a statement. Nonetheless, this is the cry. It's my body. It's my life. It's my future.

[15 : 43] I shall do as I please. When we think of end-of-life matters, well, we thank God for the measure in which attempts to grant absolute autonomy to the individual, if indeed that's ever possible, but there's an aspiration for it. But we thank God that that attempt in end-of-life decisions has been frustrated in terms of the legislative process, but the pressure will continue to build. And the slogan of those supporting assisted suicide, if we think of the Scottish example that's just very recent, the slogan that was employed is very telling. I saw the black cards and the banners, my life, my death, my choice. Is that not what we have described here at the beginning of Psalm 2?

Verse 3 in particular, let us break their chains. Let's break His chains, the chains of the Lord and His anointed ones. Throw off their fetters. We will do as we please with our nation, with our life, with our future. But we see it not only at the level of the nation and these issues that I've used as an example. We also see it in each and every one of us. In each and every one of us, there is a predisposition to oppose and resist authority. We see that from the very earliest age.

The youngest child, there's this predisposition to resist being told what to do. Nobody likes being told what to do. It grates against our desire to be in control and to do our own thing. Of course, this is seen in people's resistance to the gospel. When we go out in fulfillment of the King's mission to make disciples of all nations, why is it that so many resist becoming disciples of Jesus? Well, in great measure, there are many aspects and elements to this, but in great measure, one of the reasons is an unwillingness to submit to His Lordship. Even those who come to some conviction as to the truth of the message are still reluctant because they know that it will involve submission to the King, and we don't want to submit to the King. Now, what we discover is that to submit to King Jesus is no burden. It is a life of joy and fulfillment, but the very notion of doing so still constitutes something that people resist and recoil against. Some of you may have heard the poem that is often quoted in different contexts by Ernest Henley, *Invictus*, and lines in that poem, I think, capture the spirit of what is described here in the psalm at the beginning of the psalm. I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul. This is the spirit of the beginning of the psalm, of the nations opposing King Jesus and of so many of us opposing His authority and lordship in our lives.

But what does God make of the nations opposition to King Jesus? The nations are opposed to the King. That much is clear. What does God make of it? Is their opposition a source of concern or even frustration to God? What is it that God does in the face of their opposition? Well, He laughs, He rebukes, He declares, verses 4 through 6. Let's think of these three verbs. First of all, He laughs.

The one enthroned in heaven laughs. The Lord scoffs at them. The laughing here that is spoken of is perhaps not so much of ridicule, but rather an expression of the reality that any opposition to the King is laughable. We use the word in that sense. Well, it's laughable what is being done.

[19 : 52] Because it serves no purpose. It's futile. It's laughable. In that sense, God laughs at those who seek to oppose Him. It is the laugh of sovereign security. Let me just illustrate it in this way.

Imagine a king living in his fortified castle, this huge castle with huge walls, ramparts, protection of every kind. And a few angry little children are throwing pebbles at the walls, throwing pebbles at the walls, hoping to dethrone the king. The king looks down from his castle.

What is his attitude to these angry little children? Is he threatened by them? Is he frightened by them? Is he concerned that maybe they'll achieve their objective? The king laughs. He laughs at the futility of it. It's not that he's mocking them. It is the laugh of eternal sovereign security. He is secure on his throne. He knows that their scheming will avail nothing. And there is a sense in which we too, as citizens of the king, as those who have been brought to the place of joyfully bowing down before him, we also can laugh. Again, not in mockery of those whose lives consist of this futile opposition to the king, but laughing in that security of knowing that their opposition, however virulent and however violent it might be, we don't endure that, thank God. But many believers do, knowing that even such opposition ultimately is futile and no harm can be done beyond what the king permits for our own good and for the fulfilling of his own purposes. The enemies of the king cannot ultimately harm the king's citizens. He laughs. He rebukes. Verse 5 we read, then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath. The opposition is not only laughable, it's culpable, and the king rebukes them.

Whether they acknowledge it or not, they stand under his rebuke and anger. He declares. Indeed, what he declares, in a sense, is the content of his rebuke. Verse 6, I have installed my king on Zion. This is the message that he has for the nations who oppose him. I have installed my king on Zion. My king is on the throne. My king rules.

That's my rebuke to you. Because that is what demonstrates that your opposition is so futile.

[22 : 52] What does God promise to his son? A couple just more questions. What does God promise to his son, to King Jesus? We don't need to dwell on this because really that's where we began. We find it in verses 8 and 9.

We've identified what the Father promises to his king, the king's inheritance. He has given the nations as his inheritance, the ends of the earth as his possession. And crucially, he has given absolute authority over them. The very dramatic language, you might say even violent language of verse 9, speaks of that absolute authority that he enjoys over his possession. But let's ask one final question.

And it really applies to us very much because, as we'll see, it's a question that relates to our task. And the final question is this, what is God's message to the nations gifted to King Jesus?

They are Jesus' inheritance. They stand in opposition to the king. The king laughs at them. He rebukes them. But he has a message for them. And I say this is vitally relevant to us because we are the ones who are to deliver the message. In the gospel age, we are the ones who have to deliver this message.

We've used already the language of believers as ambassadors. And of course, it's language that we find in the Bible. Paul, as he wrote to the believers in Corinth, expressed himself in this way. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors. Christ is the king. The king has ambassadors. We are his ambassadors.

[24 : 32] As though God were making his appeal through us, we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. God has a message. Those who will deliver the message are his ambassadors, and that's you and me.

So what is the message? Well, I think it's a two-pronged message. It's a message of warning, and it's a message of invitation. In verse 10, we have that very verb. Therefore, you kings, be wise.

You who oppose the king, you who are scheming against him, this is my message of warning. Be wise. Be warned, you rulers of the earth. The king has come. King Jesus has come. He's come to save, but he's also come to judge. And all will bow the knee. If necessary, they will do so as the king wields his iron scepter, if we want to use the language of the psalm. And so we have a message of warning to deliver. We think of the words in Hebrews chapter 10 and verse 31, the reality, and in a way constitutes this warning. It is a fearful thing. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

We are to call men and women to flee from God's just and righteous anger. We are to announce that the day of judgment is approaching, and all will stand before the king and judge Jesus.

In the light of God's judgment, our warning is a call to be wise. Only a fool would appear unprepared before the judgment seat of God. As the king's ambassador, are you announcing this message of warning? But the message also is a message of invitation. Verses 11 and 12, we continue to read this message that is delivered to those who oppose God's anointed one. Serve the Lord with fear. Rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you be destroyed in your way. For His wrath can flow. This is a message of invitation to the king's enemies. This is a message of invitation to those who are under the wrath of God, and the amazing reality is that the way for them to escape God's anger is to embrace God, not to run away from Him. We might think that if somebody is angry with us, well, what do we do? We run as far away as possible from the one who is angry with us. Maybe that way we will escape from His anger. And God says, no, that's not the way to flee from my anger. It is to come to me and to find refuge in me. That is the place of safety. Not far from me, but clinging to me.

[27 : 37] And there is this invitation that is extended. Perhaps at the heart of this invitation, and much is said in these final verses, but at the heart of this invitation is this telling call to kiss the Son. Kiss the Son. Now, the call may sound very tender. It's perhaps not as tender as it might appear, because this, I think, is the kiss of submission to the Son's authority, to the King's authority. It is the kiss of one who you might see the picture of a subject kissing the hand of the sovereign. Not such a tender picture, rather one of submission to the authority of the one being kissed. Something that maybe illustrates it a little that's been very current in the news these past few weeks is Jeremy Corbyn, just elected as the leader of the Labor Party, and the question is, you know, will he go to the Privy Council? I don't know if he has to kiss the Queen's hand or bow before her in some way, but there's some physical act of symbolizing submission to the Queen's authority, and he doesn't want to do it. For his own Republican principles, and regardless of your opinion on that, the point is, he doesn't want to do that. He doesn't want to kiss her hand. He doesn't want to bow down before her, even though in this case it's just a symbolic act, really. But this is the kind of kiss that has been spoken of. The enemies are being told, don't oppose the King, but rather submit to the King.

There is safety. There is safety. Kiss the Son. Kiss the King. But this submission is a joyful submission. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.

Even in that language, rejoice with trembling, you have combined these elements that are not mutually exclusive, clearly not. This is what we're being called to do. It's what we're called to do, and what we're called to invite others to do. Rejoice in the King. Rejoice with trembling.

Rejoice with trembling. Conscious of who he is, of his authority and majesty and power and might. This trembling is appropriate in the light of the King's awesome authority. It's almost an element of our rejoicing, for he is our King. Yes, he is the one of supreme authority, but he's our King.

And because he's our King, then we can rejoice with a trembling. If we're looking at the more tender aspect of the invitation, I think we find it in the closing verse. And the closing verse is indeed beautifully tender. The closing line, really. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him.

[30 : 25] All are invited. All of the King's enemies are invited to take refuge in the King. The King's concern is not to destroy them. It's not to wreak vengeance on them. This is not what He seeks.

If they refuse to submit, then they will suffer the consequences. But the invitation is to all, to find refuge in Him. He will receive, He will welcome all who come, all who come to acknowledge His kingship, His authority, and to bow before Him. He will receive, and He will embrace, and He will provide refuge for. This is the message. It's for us, but it's also the message that we have to deliver as the King's ambassador. Is this a message that you are delivering? Are you delivering this message of invitation to those who, as yet, have not bowed the knee before King Jesus? Of course, people can't submit in any meaningful way to a King that they don't know. They need to find out about this King.

They need to find out who He is. We need to introduce them to King Jesus. Different ways we can do that as we speak to them. I mentioned has been made these past couple of weeks of the Christianity Explored course that will begin in a couple of weeks, precisely going through the Gospel of Mark, where the kingship of Jesus is presented, that people would discover that He is the King, and discovering that He is the King, so would be able to be given the opportunity to bow down before Him. This is our task, the mission that we've been given, to go to the nations. The King has sent us. There's a message to deliver. May God help us to deliver it. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your Word.

We thank You for what it tells us of who You are and of Your Son, King Jesus. We thank You that He is indeed the one to whom I've been given the nations, the ends of the earth, as His inheritance, as His possession. We thank You for the call that is directed to us, a call that dignifies us, that we would participate in that great task of delivering to the nations a message from God, a message of warning, but also a message of loving and tender invitation to seek and to find refuge in Him. Help us, we pray, to deliver that message, and we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.