

Let the Nations Fear

Psalm 2

Nov. 13, 2016 AM

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This morning we continue our series on kingdoms of the world with the third of four messages. Now consider that most of the time I was preparing this message was the two weeks leading up to the election. I had no idea who would be elected and no way of predicting how this message might fall on us today. I am thankful for the timeliness of this series in my own life. It has encouraged me and provided a biblical focus on government and national leaders through an election that has been unique, challenging, and ugly to say the least. It is my hope that on this first Sunday after the election, we will find a comfort from God's word that brings peace, and rest, and truth amid political changes. May this morning's passage from Psalms be a reminder that our hope is not in political leaders or parties, but in Jesus our redeemer and Lord.

Our passage this morning is Psalm 2. And it is a great reminder that our God transcends this world and its leaders. He moves the hearts of Kings with a single thought and the future of every kingdom that has ever been or is to come must be subject to His sovereign rule. Those who belong to Christ need not fear or be anxious, no matter how troubling things around us appear. Do not tremble though the world around us seems to crumble and be against us. And do not hope in the victories of men, however much they seem to support your cause. There is only one whom you should fear. Only one in whom you should hope. And He is the one true King of an everlasting Kingdom; a kingdom where our refuge and redemption are made complete.

The context of Psalms, Chapter 2 sets a picture of the rebellion of the world in conflict with God and His Son. You see, even in the days of Israel, the kingdom conflict of a fallen world and God's anointed One was being waged. The nations and rulers around Israel were against its king and its God. The world did not accept God's ruler then and it will not accept his rule now. The conflict we see in this passage carries forward into the New Testament as well. The early Christians quote this Psalm in Acts 4 as they identified the conflict of Jewish leaders with Christ and His followers. Later in scripture, Revelations 2 and 12 also allude to this Psalm and identify Jesus as the ultimate victor of this conflict at the end of days. The rebellion of the world against God started in the garden after creation and will continue until Christ comes again in victory.

This should not surprise us. Scripture tells us that the world will hate us because it hates Christ. And this conflict will continue until Christ returns and brings an end to Satan and his dominion. It should come as no surprise to us then, when the people, governments, and rulers of this world are in opposition to Christ. As much as we may hope for moral and just leaders, the reality is that in every culture, true Christians are and will be a minority. Therefore, national and political leaders in any capacity, are more likely to reflect the values of an unbelieving world than values of God's people. The world around us is simply a reflection of its father, who is Satan. And where he is present, darkness and evil are sure to follow, whether visible or

hidden, it will be there. For however complacent and accustomed we become, the truth is that we live in a world that is nothing less than a mutiny against the authority and rule of Christ.

If the context of Psalm 2 is the world's rebellion, then its focus is the promise of an anointed ruler. One who comes from God to defeat the world and take possession of it. In the immediate sense, we can see that the allusion here is to David, God's anointed king over Israel. David is the great king of Israel who conquers the surrounding nations and brings a period of peace to God's people. His reign represents the fulfillment of conquering the promised land of Canaan and the victory of God's people.

Yet this Anointed One is also referred to in two other ways in this passage. He is God's King and He is God's Son. Clearly this Psalm is pointing us to the greater David; the Anointed One who is Jesus the promised Messiah. Even the words at one point in this passage are expressed as a decree of this Anointed One. This morning we will hear the promise of One who will end rebellion and conflict once and for all. Here is the One who will conquer sin and death and bring the true Israel to the promise of eternal glory and victory for God's people.

Turn in your copies of God's Word to Psalms Chapter 2. Our passage breaks down neatly into 4 sections; with each section having three verses. In our first section, our narrator or psalmist speaks. In the second section, God speaks. In the third section, the Anointed One speaks. And in the fourth section we conclude with the narrator speaking again. **So follow along as I read all 12 verses of Psalm 2.** This is what God's Word says.

1 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." 4 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." 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." 10 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.

[opening prayer]

I have a simple outline for this morning's message that I would like you to remember. It's a simple 4-point outline that maps directly back to the words in the Psalm. So listen; here are the 4 points I would like you to remember. Point one, nations rage. Point two, God laughs. Isn't that great? We could stop right there and this would be a great encouragement, right? But it gets better, so let's keep going. Point three, Jesus rules. And point four, kings warned.

Ok, simple right. Nations rage. God laughs. Jesus rules. And Kings warned. This time I want you to say it with me. Ready? Nations rage. God laughs. Jesus rules. Kings warned. Got it? These are great thoughts to remember. For a moment, I thought about doing this with motions to drive these points even deeper. If this were children's church it would go something like this. Nations rage [fist up]. God laughs [snicker]. Jesus rules [crown over head]. Kings are warned [points and glares]. But I won't ask you to do that. You're relieved, right? Good, so let's look to God's Word to build on these four points.

Psalm 2 opens with the narrator depicting the rebellion of the world as the nations rage. From the people to its rulers, what is described here is a chaffing and striving against Christ. Charles Haddon Spurgeon said of these verses, "We have, in these first three verses, a description of the hatred of human nature against the Christ of God." Let's look again at the first three verses. Follow along as I read.

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."

First, look at how these verses describe where this rebellion comes from. We have the rage of **nations**. Next, the **people** are plotting. The **kings** set themselves against God. And finally, the **rulers** counsel together. I believe we are to see the completeness of the rebellion from top to bottom. First, the Psalmist asks a question aimed at the people and nations of this world. Why do nations rage and the people plot against God? The questions may be rhetorical, but it seems to be answered in verse 3, which we will get to next. Also, note that the Psalmist reminds us that their rebellion is in vain. It is futile and without success. And it is futile, because the nations and kings of this world cannot by any means thwart the sovereign plans of our God.

In verse 2, we see that the leaders of the world reflect its people. Their kings set themselves against God and their rulers take counsel in defiance against His anointed. And if they are in opposition to Christ, they are in opposition to His kingdom and mission. I think one of the dangers we must recognize is that we become complacent when we equate superficial morality in our political leaders and parties with a lack of opposition to Christ. 1 Timothy 2 reminds us that we should pray for our leaders; that they allow us to live godly, peaceful and quiet lives. But we can also be glad when God allows us to more clearly see the opposition and rebellion of this world. The light of Christ in the Gospel shines brighter as our world grows spiritually darker.

But what is the cause of this great rebellion? Why do the nations rage and its rulers set themselves against God? From this verse, we see that they view God's authority as bondage and restraint. The flesh wants to put self on the throne; to be free to do whatever it wants. Nike captured this years ago with their brand slogan, "Just do it". The sinful self dangerously rejects the boundaries and guides God has given us for our own good. It wants to live as if we are the only person in the world that matters and as if there are no consequences of our actions to ourselves and others. This was the lie of Satan to Adam and Eve in the garden. "Will you really die?" he said as he twisted God's word and caused them to doubt the Father's goodness and

authority. And so the lie continues. From Adam, to the time this Psalm was written, and until today, where a fallen and lost world has bought into it and rebels and rejects God and His Son.

Our next section takes us from the nations rage to God's response. If the first three verses cause us to become discouraged or concerned, the psalmist reminds us God is not rattled by it. So the nations rage? Ok then. God laughs. It's that simple. Take heart brothers and sisters. God is as far above the nations and its rulers as the sun is above the earth. And just as its brightness drives out the dark of night so the power of our God will drive out evil and rebellion. Let's look at verses 4 through 6. Please follow along with me.

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."

The voice speaking in these verses transitions here from the narration of the psalmist to the voice of God. How does the almighty God, ruler and creator of the universe respond to the rebellion and rage of the world and its leaders? He simply laughs. But this is not the laughter of children or a humorous reaction. The verse here describes for us a laughter of derision. Who are these people and its leaders that have the arrogance to stand up to our God? Would an ant overpower the crushing weight of an elephant? Would a blade of grass stop the force of a hurricane by setting itself against the wind? Such is the foolishness and deception of sin. That man would set himself against the power and rule of God is the height of self-importance and pride.

One commentary noted that this is the one place in scripture where God is said to laugh. But this is not a funny, "ha-ha" kind of laughter. God laughs at the vanity and futility of man's rebellion. It is a laughter that should send chills down the spine of those who do not know God. For we see that when God speaks to the world, it is with wrath and fury. In hearing God's voice, the nations and its leaders are terrified. In these verses we hear God's rebuke to the nations. In essence, His response is this. "You rebel and reject my authority. So much good it will do you. For I have already placed my King over His kingdom. There is nothing you can do."

The Psalmist reminds us that the victory and reign of God's King is assured. The coming of His kingdom in power and might has and will prevail. Though the world would attack and reject God and His people, His kingdom will not be overcome. God's kingdom shall grow and flourish until the Gospel, the story of God's Anointed One, has reached every tribe, and tongue, and nation. And for those of us who are citizens of God's kingdom can find rest and comfort in God's laughter. Our God is sovereign over the rage of the nations. And He will bring His people home under the rule and reign of His Holy King.

Let's move on to the next section of this passage. In the first three verses the psalmist speaks. In the next three verses God speaks in response. So who is speaking in verses 7 through 9? As we will read, the Psalmist turns our ears to hear a decree spoken in the voice of the anointed King, God's Son. Follow along as I read verses 7 through 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 Anointed King tells us that his authority has been established by God; just as we read in the previous passage. In the immediate context of Israel's king, there is an acknowledgement that his authority and kingdom have been brought about by God the Father. Additionally, the King will do the will of the Father. And God will make of the nations an inheritance and expand the kingdom. The nations that rage around Israel will be broken and shattered into many pieces. The picture here is one of utter and complete destruction. A destruction of such power that the nations will never come together again. The king will reign and his victory will be complete.

Does verse 7 seem familiar to you? Where else have we heard the phrase *"You are my Son; today I have begotten you"*? This verse is quoted in the Gospels at Jesus' baptism. In affirming Jesus and his ministry, God reaches back to this passage and connects the Anointed Holy King and begotten Son to Christ. We are to hear the voice speaking in this passage as a prophetic voice of Christ hearing from the Father. Jesus is the beloved Son of God.

And we should be encouraged to hear that God will make an inheritance of nations for His Anointed King. Out of the nations that rage and rebel will come a new kingdom that will extend to the ends of the earth. While the world around us is on a fast track to defeat, there will be some who will be rescued and redeemed for the glory of the Lord. And those who shook their fists in anger at God will someday embrace Him as redeemer and Lord. Let us never forget that our God has established an eternal King who will come and rule an eternal kingdom with all authority and power.

Our final section of this passage ends with a warning. We return to the voice of the Psalmist who spoke in the first three verses. These verses offer a softer and earnest plea to end the rebellion and striving against God. It is the gentle call of a victor to surrender against unbeatable odds. We are to understand the futility of raging against the Almighty; to turn in repentance and submission. Let's look at the final three verses of this passage. Follow along with me.

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.

The essence of the warning to the kings and rulers of the nations is to be wise and heed the warning. Do not continue to foolishly stand against the Lord. Instead, turn your heart to serve Him and rejoice in His victory. But notice the qualification the Psalmist provides to these to actions. They are to serve with a fear of an awesome God and they are to tremble at His power in the midst of being joyful. It seems to me that in our modern day of technology and apparent knowledge we have lost a sense of the awesome power of our God. We are blissfully ignorant of His mighty power, the majesty of His rule, and the brightness of His glory. Yes, He is a loving God full of mercy, love, and grace. But perhaps if we had a deeper sense of His awesome power and perfection we would live our lives with a deep sense of service and joy.

The final verse of this passage is a reminder to submit ourselves to God's Son. The image of a kiss here is not a romantic sign of affection. Picture someone kneeling to kiss the hand of a king.

It is a sign of honor and recognition of authority. It stands in contrast to the first three verses for it is precisely what the rulers of the nations will not do.

Here is the warning. Don't be like the rulers of the nations that rage. For they will perish at the pouring out of God's wrath. Kiss the hand of the marvelous Son of God who died in your place. Find your refuge in Him. For on the cross he took upon Himself the wrath we deserved. Standing in our place he took the punishment for our rebellion. For those who trust in Christ will surely find refuge and redemption in the forever and permanent Kingdom of our Lord.

Let me wrap this up this morning with a few reflections on this passage. We find ourselves this morning at the end of an election cycle heading in to four years with a new leader. But I would suggest to you that despite all the noise and emotion around the election, not much has changed. Our nation is still in rebellion against God. The world still hates Christ and His followers. And no matter how comfortable we may get, this world will never be home. It is just a temporary place on our way to a heavenly kingdom.

So over the last few months and even looking forward, what has been your heart's response to the recent political election process. I'd like to key in on three responses. They are to struggle with fear, to struggle with feeling threatened, and to find rest. Let's consider each of these separately.

Many of us considered the outcome of the election and more than anything else you've struggled with being afraid. I've seen posts on Facebook and heard people questioning and it sounds like this. "What is this world coming to? How could we have ended up with such terrible options for president? This election is our last chance to stop the ruin of this country." While there is a place for being wise and taking advantage of our responsibility and privilege to vote, we must not do so out of fear of the future. Nations rage. God laughs. Jesus rules. And Kings are warned. Nothing in this world can thwart God's will for the nations nor keep us from the refuge we find in Christ. As Jesus said to the disciples in the storm, "Do not be afraid."

Some of us considered the outcome of the election and more than anything else we've struggled with feeling threatened. We have become used to a life of comfort and ease. The outcome of the election could have impacted our financial stability and our earnings, led to higher taxes, and seen more governmental policies in opposition to Christian values. Life would have been more difficult. It may have even led to greater opposition to Christians and churches in our country. But brothers and sisters, our greatest desire for this election should not be our own personal comfort and ease. Nor should we place our hope in political leaders and parties. Nations rage. God laughs. Jesus rules. And Kings are warned. Let us not be like our rulers who strive for their own personal glory and gain. May we seek Christ and His kingdom above all, striving to serve and be joyful under His authority and care.

And there were those who considered the outcome of the election and more than anything else felt peace and rest. We felt rest because there is nothing to fear in this life. In fact, it is the nations who should fear and see the futility of their rebellion and fear the Lord God. We felt

rest because our treasure is laid up in heaven and nothing on this earth satisfies our soul like Jesus. We felt rest because we have found refuge and redemption in Jesus. He is our hope and comfort even during these difficult days. For if we have trusted God for an eternal salvation than we may be assured He can be trusted for the remainder of our days here on earth. Nations rage. God laughs. Jesus rules. And Kings are warned. May we all find rest and blessing in the truth that our God reigns over all.

Let me end with one final but important reflection on this passage. Perhaps you've sat here this morning and realized that you are like the raging nations in passage. You've lived your life your way. You've rebelled against God, His authority, and His Son Jesus. But you've found that road difficult and the people you trusted have brought disappointment. Let today be the day you end your personal rebellion and make God's Son the Lord and King of your life. Jesus calls you to repent and trust him for shelter and salvation. Listen and heed that call, for blessed are those who take refuge in Christ.

[Let's pray]

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