

November 29, 2015
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Psalms
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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NO FEAR, NO GRACE
Psalm 2

You no doubt remember the rage some years ago where all the teens were wearing T-shirts that had the words “No Fear” emblazoned across the front. Shirts like that were a staple for guys who wanted to appear to be macho but looked rather ridiculous on skinny, junior high, wanna-be types. I have sometimes had a picture in my mind of a tough, independent, rugged kind of guy standing in line at the judgment seat of Christ wearing his “No Fear” T-shirt. I can see Jesus the Judge looking down at the man and saying, “Really?”

There is a time for fear. When I was a child, there was a fenced-in pasture only a few yards behind our house. Inside the fence was Lloyd Bean’s herd of holstein cows and one very fearsome looking bull named Jake. He probably weighed over 2,000 pounds. He was very muscular and had an ugly, large ring that pierced his nose and a piece of heavy chain that hung from the ring. I remember the adults in my life saying, “Don’t mess with that bull. If you make him angry, you will be sorry.” I didn’t need to be warned twice. If the football accidentally flew over the fence into the pasture, it just stayed there until Jake went home.

If we were to issue the same warning about Jesus to our peers today, they would think we have lost our minds. “Don’t make Jesus angry” sounds like something a Puritan or Pilgrim would say. In this soft and effeminate culture we live in, the idea of gentle Jesus getting angry is considered to be an oxymoron. A loving God and a wrathful God just don’t go together in most minds.

In this Psalm that Peter attributed to David (Acts 4:25), we are reminded that it is very dangerous to be opposed to God because He

is powerful and fearsome. At the same time, this Psalm expresses a gracious invitation for all people to come to God through Jesus the Son where we find genuine happiness. It is a wonderful reminder that until we fear God, we cannot understand or appreciate His grace.

People Rage Against God (vv.1-3).

This psalm opens with a sad and ugly picture of people who are opposed to God and His Christ (vv.1-2). Saddest and most ugly is the fact that this is the default response of God’s created beings toward Him. They rage and plot. David asked, *Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain (v.1)?*

The terms *nations* and the *peoples* are generally synonymous. Often the first word speaks of Gentiles. The word *peoples* might be a reference more to the common folks. At various times in history the words can apply to specific groups or nations. That would be the case in the application of this statement to the Jewish people and particularly their leaders who raged against Jesus. Maybe that is why this is one of the most frequently quoted Psalms by the New Testament.

Peter applied this accusation specifically to the people who crucified Christ and who had just threatened the apostles against preaching Christ. “[Sovereign Lord] 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 4:25-28).

Therefore, the same question applies to our modern world, “Why are people raging and plotting in vain?” People still rage and plot. A rage is a vehement noise, a tumult, a throng that looks like a riot. Plotting is an odd idea that speaks of mumbling, muttering, or moaning. Together both of these words are a good description of our world. We constantly see video images of crowds of people protesting one thing or another, indicating a spirit of unrest in the

world. We cannot go through a day without hearing a co-worker, neighbor, or newscaster muttering about stuff that is wrong. But before we point accusing fingers, we need to remember that we also do this kind of stuff ourselves. And it is all vain, empty, pointless. Such tumult and mumbling is especially pointless when we consider the object. The complaints and rages of the world are against God.

Not only are the created beings generally in a rage against the Creator, but the rulers consult together against God. *The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his anointed, saying (v.2)*. David pictured these significant people in the world setting themselves against God. It is a picture of how the kings desire to rule over more and greater kingdoms. They are driven by greed and selfishness. They fight and war because of their desire to have. It is precisely as James assessed it when he wrote, *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions (James 4:1-3)*. They are not willing to submit to God and His plan for creation because they think they have a better idea.

Therefore, these people plan against God. Literally the text states that the rulers of the world lay a foundation against Yahweh. The foundation is the first step and the rest of the building follows the pattern of the foundation. If the foundation is contrary to God, the whole plan is contrary to God. Therefore, the idea of meeting together to determine the shape and nature of the foundation is interpreted as “to deliberate, to plan, to take counsel.” But how many kings and rulers throughout history would be willing to boldly declare that they are opposed to the Creator and are planning to work in direct conflict with His will? Generally rebellious leaders assume there is no Creator God. Or they have a very skewed view of God and maybe worship a plethora of gods. Or if they are like the ancient Roman emperors, they have convinced themselves that they are God.

Such planning and the outworking of those plans makes life difficult for people who love God and desire to obey Him. In light of

these truths, I cannot help but think of the words Isaac Watts penned back in the 18th century:

Must I be carried to the skies
On flow'ry beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed through bloody seas?
Are there no foes for me to face?
Must I not stem the flood?
Is this vile world a friend to grace,
To help me on to God?

The rulers and leaders end up plotting specifically against Jesus Christ. Because this is a Psalm about Jesus the Messiah, the rulers and kings in this case were those who took counsel to torture and kill Jesus. The rulers of the Jews, the sixty-two members of the Sanhedrin, met in counsel to consider how to rid themselves of God's anointed Messiah. Matthew told us, *When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death (Matthew 27:1)*.

We also know that kings, like Herod, set themselves against the LORD's Anointed. Herod the Great did this from the moment Christ was born. After the Magi had visited the baby Jesus, *behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him" (Matthew 2:13)*.

Pilate, the governor, set himself against the Christ. The indictment against him is recorded forever. *So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified (Mark 15:15)*. These men were examples of “*the rulers of this age*.” Paul pointed out that *None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory (1 Corinthians 2:8)*.

But the rulers of this age did not understand God's amazingly gracious plan of redemption because they were, and still are, determined to be independent of God. They still cry out, “*Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us*” (v.3). The people still do not acknowledge Christ as King. The term *their bonds*

refers to the law and authority of the Triune God. God the Father has given His law and revealed His power and divine nature in Creation. God the Son expects people to keep His commands. God the Holy Spirit convicts of sin.

The rulers of the people almost continually demonstrate attempts to throw off God's "restrictions." No people group demonstrates that better than Americans over the past century. Time and again the laws passed by Congress, the presidential mandates, and the Supreme Court decisions have cut across the grain of God's bonds and cords.

The people think they can defeat Christ. To the people in His day, Christ represented perfect righteousness. Sinful leaders chaff at perfect righteousness. Still the battle is against the Christ who offers peace with God.

God Is Amused (vv.4-5).

David concluded that for people to try to stand against God is a joke. *He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision (v.4).* God laughs at the rebels' foolishness. This is not an arrogant disposition like haughty humans would display. Rather this is a picture of God the Creator enthroned in all His power and majesty in heaven. Why do these foolish, arrogant rulers who are in the process of passing away think they are so mighty? Compared to God, they are hardly noticeable. They might rule a large portion of the world for a time, or they might be wildly popular, or they might be Time magazine man of the year for five years running. But they soon will be dust. How foolish they are compared to God.

Because the people choose to be foolish, God keeps rebels in derision. God's plans and omnipotence keep the independent people floundering in such stammering confusion that it is laughable. They look like children at play. Jesus described them well when He described the movers and shakers of His day. *"But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn'" (Matthew 11:16-17).*

Regardless of the foolish responses of foolish people, God will declare His eternal purpose. In a word, God's eternal purpose is that Jesus is King – Period! God said, *"As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill" (v.6).* God's plan is complete and unchanging. In eternity He chose Jerusalem to be His special city. He chose to put His presence there in the Solomon's temple. He chose to put Christ the eternal King in the city while He was on earth. He entered the city to the shouts of fickle people to fulfill God's prophecy. Matthew wrote, *This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden'" (Matthew 21:4-5).* He will come again in great power and glory to set up His kingdom where He will reign from Jerusalem.

Nothing that all the powerful men of earth can do will change that plan. Threats from the leaders of Iran mean nothing to God. His will is determined and all things are working toward that end. The people who try to attack God and His plan will one day face His wrath. For awhile the fools appear to be amusing, but when God speaks in wrath, it is no joking matter. *Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury (v.7).*

There are many examples of God speaking to sinners in His wrath. Like He spoke to the individual – Cain who killed his brother. Like God's wrath against the whole world during the flood. Like God's wrath against Pharaoh's Egypt. And there are even examples of God's wrath against His own people on multiple occasions in the desert.

God still speaks in wrath, and it should terrify the world when He does. The chaos both socially and physiologically in the world today is not accidental. The old prophet Amos left us with an eternal principle when he asked, *Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it? (Amos 3:6).* God's voice of wrath is being heard all over the world. But who is listening? When a people should be terrified but are not, they are in a hopeless condition.

God Will Enforce His Plan (vv.7-9).

Men might raise their fists of rebellion against God. It will only bring God's wrath against them. God isn't going to change His plan. His plan for eternity is that Christ will inherit the nations. The Father loves the Son. David wrote, *I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you"* (v.7). But now we notice in David's psalm that Christ the King speaks. God the Father was speaking. But now God the Son declared that He has received the Creator's decree.

God's decree is more unchanging, more secure than the unchanging laws of the Medes and Persians. Jesus will reign not only because He won the title deed to the kingdoms of the world by His sacrifice on Calvary; but Jesus will reign because God has decreed that it shall be. It is not that Jesus Christ the unique, eternal Son of God was given birth. Rather this is the picture of a coronation. The beloved Son is predestined to rule on David's throne. It is the fulfillment of God's promise to David.

When David decided that he would build a temple for God's glory, God sent the prophet Nathan to tell him that wasn't going to happen. However, at the same time, God gave an astonishing promise to David. He promised, *"And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever"* (2 Samuel 7:16). Forever? How can a king reign forever? If the king is Jesus Christ, God the Son, He must reign forever.

Though it is still future, the plan will be executed. We learned recently in our study through Hebrews how this plan is being executed. That author asked, *For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son"?* (Hebrews 1:5). He also wrote, *So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"* (Hebrews 5:5). Because God will certainly bring this promise to pass, Paul could preach with all confidence that God had to raise Jesus from the dead so that He can reign as king: *this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"* (Acts 13:33).

That promised reign of Christ means that the Father has given the nations to the Son. He said, *Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession* (v.8). This is a very significant promise, one that Satan fully understands. This promise is why Satan tempted Jesus to shortcut the Father's plan. *Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me"* (Matthew 4:8-9). Jesus resisted the devil, obeyed the Father, died to redeem the kingdoms and will one day initiate the purification of the kingdoms as He opens the title deed to that which He won.

John saw in the vision called *the Revelation: And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne* (Revelation 5:6-7). That is God's plan.

As a result of His victory on the cross, Christ will rule. God's plan for Him is: *You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel* (v.9). Jesus Christ will destroy all resistance. This is a reference to Armageddon – that last great battle. God will draw all the kings and rulers who will take counsel against the Christ into the final battle. Christ the King will come in mighty glory and power and destroy all who resist Him.

Jesus gave John this same statement near the middle of the Revelation where He showed John that *She* [the nation of Israel] *gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne* (Revelation 12:5). Later John wrote, *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 (Revelation 19:11-15). No ruler, king, or evil person of any kind will escape the crushing blow of the Son's wrath.

Then when He has established His Kingdom, Christ will rule in perfect justice. On one hand, the Bible texts say often that He will rule with a rod of iron. That statement is also found in Christ's message to the church in Thyatira where He said, "*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 (Revelation 2:26-27).*"

Actually, this repeated reference to the rod of iron probably speaks of the cleansing process that will put the Kingdom in order so the King can reign. When He reigns, He will reign in perfect justice. The Old Testament prophet foresaw that *The LORD within her is righteous; He does no injustice; every morning He shows forth his justice; each dawn He does not fail; but the unjust knows no shame (Zephaniah 3:5)*. He learned from God that *The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing (Zephaniah 3:17)*. That will be a wonderful kingdom in which to live.

God Graciously Invites Kings to Serve Him (vv.10-12).

God's invitation for all is for us to be wise and fear God. The wise people are the ones who heed God's warning. *Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth (v.10)*. Solomon taught us that *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10)*. That actually means that fearing God is the first step in salvation. Wise men and women heed those warnings of Scripture. Salvation begins by listening to God's warnings.

Also, the wise rejoice with trembling. David wrote, *Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling (v.11)*. The created being must never lose the fear of the Lord. This begins as fear of retribution, fear of the mighty power of God based on the warnings God gives about judgment against sin. This fear leads to faith in which we throw all hope for the future on God. Mature fear then is motivated by the desire not to grieve God and break fellowship with

Him. That is how mature fear rejoices with trembling. These two responses are contradictory to human wisdom. But in reality, they are complementary in God's wisdom.

Finally, we learn of God's wonderful invitation to come and kiss the Son. This invitation is especially important in light of the fact that it is not wise to make the Son angry. The warning is *Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled (v.12a)*. "How can this be?" modern religionists wonder. Gentle Jesus paid the greatest price possible to pay for His people's sins. That price is no small matter to Him. That is why sin and rebellion will incite the anger of the Son who is also the King. He is altogether justified to be angry with sin and sinners.

Not to worry! God is not a vengeful ogre who is looking for someone to squash. Rather, He tempers the reality that Christ who paid sin's penalty can become angry with the promise that people who take refuge in Christ are happy. *Blessed are all who take refuge in him (v.12b)*. So come and take refuge in Him. The best way to avoid Christ's wrath is to trust His love for you. Only people who understand the awesome danger of sinning against God will learn the great joy of God's gracious forgiveness.

God is no push over, no cosmic divine Teddy Bear, no Santa Claus with a fake "Ho, ho, ho." He is our holy Creator who created us in His image to reflect His glory. When the creature is determined to be independent of God and reflect his or her own glory, he or she brings God's wrath. And yet this same God has provided for us the perfectly just Savior who will also reign as the righteous King. We do well to trust God's plan, trust His work, and joyfully yield to His authority.