

'Making Sense of the Psalms No.2'
Armagh: Wednesday 3rd June 2009
Psalm 2:1-12

Introduction

This summer I am taking you through a short series called:

"Making Sense of Selected Psalms"

We are not looking at all of them – just about 10 or so.

We looked at Psalm 1 last time.

This evening we're looking at Psalm 2 and next week we'll look at Psalm 8. Then we'll look at Psalm 19 – all about the Psalmist's love for God's Word. Then we will look at three Psalms all about Christ: 22 – Christ on the Cross, 23 – Christ as the Shepherd, and 24 – Christ as the King. And finally we will look at three Psalms all about finding forgiveness: 32, 51 and 103.

Some people find the Psalms hard to understand - they can also be hard to preach from. They were of course first recorded as the hymn book of God's Old Testament people – the Jews, but for many people today the Psalms are a closed book, and yet they are '*recorded for our learning.*' (1 Cor 10:6-13). They are spiritual poems.

Let me give a quick summary of Psalm 1 for those who weren't here last time.

Psalm No.1 – "Two Ways to Live"

The Psalm broke up very easily into 3 sections:

(vs.1-3) The Man who walks with God – The righteous man.

- (i) His Separation - from all that is sinful.
- (ii) His Secret – his love for the Word of God.
- (iii) His Success – he is like a fruitful tree.

(vs.4-5) The Man who rejects God – The wicked man.

- (i) His life is worthless – instead of a fruitful tree, he is like chaff.
- (ii) His future is fearful – he will fail God's judgement.
- (iii) He will be cast out from God's presence – forever.

(v.6) Conclusion – *"For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish."*

The stark contrast between these two ways to live couldn't be more clearly spelled out, ***so the question for us is - which way will we live our lives?***

- ***With God, or without Him?***
- ***For God, or against Him?***
- ***Worshipping God, or mocking Him?***
- ***In Righteousness, or in Wickedness?***
- ***Godly, or Ungodly?***

There are only two ways to live, so we need to make sure we are living the right way and praying for those who are not, that they will repent before it is too late for them!

Psalm 1 is a very personal Psalm. It begins, “***Blessed is the man***” focussing very much on the individual and how he or she chooses to live their life for or against God.

Psalm 2 moves from the personal level to the national level.

It begins by asking the question:

“***Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?***” (v.1)

But it is not just focussing on the nations, in v.2 it actually addresses **the kings** of the earth and **the rulers** who gather together against the Lord and his Anointed One (v.2).

Now we could spend a lot of time trying to figure out why Psalm 2 was written, who wrote it and what was its original context? But the short answer to those questions is that we don't really know. Psalms 1 and 2 are introductory Psalms. Some people even think they used to be joined together as one Psalm beginning with a 'Blessed' in (1:1) and ending with a 'Blessed' in (2:12). Unlike many of the other Psalms they don't have a title telling us who wrote them, or what was the occasion of their writing, so to try to figure that out would be pure conjecture.

A far more useful way into '**Making Sense of this Psalm**' is to see how it was used in the New Testament, because it was often quoted from by the New Testament writers, because ultimately it is a Psalm that speaks about Christ himself!

The Psalm breaks up into 4 equal sections of 3 verses each:

1. The Opposition of the Nations (vs.1-3)

These verses ask the question, why the nations conspire and the peoples plot together. And the kings and the rulers – why do they stand against, or oppose, the Lord and his Anointed One?

Now 'the LORD' is obviously the God of Israel, the Creator of heaven and earth. He is the God of the Old Testament who made his covenant with the Hebrew people, the children of Israel.

But who is 'His Anointed One'?

Well originally that would have been a term used to refer to the kings of Israel such as Saul, or David or Solomon. They were anointed as kings over Israel, because they had been chosen by God – they were God's anointed.

But we know that the Kings of Israel began to go from bad to worse. They weren't very good kings at all. And so eventually God promised that he would one day raise up “*Great David's Greater Son.*” One day a baby would be born descended from the house and line of David, who really would be 'God's Anointed' in the fullest sense of that word. Of course you know who I'm talking

about – it's Jesus, and one of the titles given to Jesus was the Christ or the Messiah both of which mean 'The Anointed One.'
Messiah (Hebrew) & Christ (Greek) both mean 'The Anointed One' (Matt 1:17 footnote).

And so when Psalm 2 begins by wondering why the nations and the peoples of the earth, together with their kings and rulers, take their stand against the Lord and against His Anointed One, it was particularly looking forward to NT Times, when the Christ would come and be opposed and rejected by the peoples of this world. In fact that brings us to one of the first references to this Psalm in the New Testament. Because in **Acts 4:23-31** we have an example of the nations raging against Christ and his people.

This was in the early days of the New Testament Church. It's just after the Day of Pentecost and it was in fact the first time that the Apostles were arrested for preaching the Gospel – the Good News about Jesus, the Messiah, who had just died on the cross.

So the very first time they experienced opposition to their message, the very first time they experienced persecution and imprisonment for their faith in Christ, The Holy Spirit turned their minds back to Psalm 2.
This was an example of the nations and peoples of the earth clubbing together against the Lord and against his Christ. In fact in v.27 it goes into detail: It was Herod, the so-called king of the Jews and Pontius Pilate, the Governor of the Romans who had joined forces against Jesus. It was the Gentile people *and* the people of Israel who had banded together to get rid of Christ.
But they didn't take God by surprise – This was all part of God's plan and purpose (v.28). They had done their best to get rid of God's Messiah and our Saviour, but in fact by putting him to death on a cross, God was able to raise him from the dead on the third day, and in so doing accomplish everything that was necessary for our salvation! *'Men meant it for evil, but God meant it for good'* – God turned it around!
And it's that which brings us to the next part of Psalm 2, which I've called...

2. The Derision of God (vs.4-6)

It says in v.4 that God laughs at them, *"the One enthroned in heaven laughs."* He laughs at the very idea that these puny men and women who have got above their station, think that they can thwart the eternal plans of God to save a people for Himself. He scoffs at them (v.4b), which is exactly what the godless sinners did in Psalm 1:1. God laughs and scoffs from heaven at those who think they can stand against him or oppose his plan and purposes for this world and for his people. He alone is God, but even the best of men are only men at best - taken from the dust of the earth!

But v.5 goes on to say that, *'He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath.'* It is laughable what men try to do against God, laughable if it

wasn't so serious. So here we read of God rebuking men in his anger and terrifying them by his wrath. God doesn't just laugh at the proud schemes of men that come to nothing, he is actually angry with them. Our God is a God of wrath. Yes, He loves the world enough to send his only son to die on a cross to save them, but if they continue to reject Him then he will pour out his wrath upon them. They will feel the full anger of God upon them.

But no matter what men try to do, God's purposes still stand firm. So having laughed at them and got angry with them he calmly states the facts (v.6)

He says, "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill."

In other words this is something that is already accomplished - it's a *fait accompli* - it cannot be altered, it is done! God has already installed His King in Zion, on his holy hill – and that king is King Jesus. By his death on a hill just outside Jerusalem, and by his resurrection from the dead on the third day Jesus has been declared with power to be the Son of God and to be the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And there is absolutely no power on earth that can change that or tear him down from his throne!

So think about it: All the manoeuvrings of the Muslims (the Palestinians) to take possession of Jerusalem and to build their mosque on the Temple Mount where it is today, and to hold onto the Temple Mount in any peace settlement between the Palestinians and Israel will not affect God's plans and purposes one iota.

Jesus has already been installed as King – He already is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords - but He now reigns in a greater Zion, in the City of our God, the New Jerusalem. There he already sits installed and enthroned on his holy hill. And one day as John saw in Revelation 21 this New Jerusalem will come down out of heaven from God, and Christ will be seated upon his Throne (see Rev 21:1-8).

3. The Proclamation of the Lord (vs.7-9)

Notice the opening words of v.7: *"I will proclaim the decree of the Lord."*

In other words what follows is part of the eternal decree of God. And God's decrees cannot be changed. These are things that will be true for all eternity.

What are they?

Christ's Eternal Sonship: *"You are my Son"*

Jesus is the Son of God. He always has been and he always will be. He is the eternal Son of God. God the Father spoke from heaven in *Matthew 3:17* to prove this at Jesus' baptism. Jesus was 30 years old at that time, just beginning his ministry, but after 30 years in this sinful world God was still able to say of Him,

"This is my son, whom I love, with him I am well-pleased."

He was and is the sinless, spotless Son of God. Everything he did pleased the Father.

But Psalm 2:7 goes on to say, *“Today I have become your Father”*

What does that mean?

Well Paul quotes this verse in Acts 13:33 as he preaches in Pisidian Antioch. He does so in the context of talking about the resurrection. So in some sense the resurrection proves the point that Jesus of Nazareth is the Eternal Son of God. It's Romans 1:1-4 that explains this. He was *‘declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.’* The fact that God raised Jesus from the dead is further proof, if proof were needed, that Jesus really is the Son of God.

(N.B. Hebrews 1:5 also quotes this verse to prove that Jesus is the Son of God, not just an angel or a messenger from heaven. He is in fact God the Son come in the flesh!)

Christ's Eternal Inheritance

*“Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance,
The ends of the earth your possession.”*

This is another part of God's eternal decree as far as his Son is concerned. All Jesus has to do is ask of his Father and the Father will make the nations his inheritance. He will give the ends of the earth to him as his eternal possession.

What does that mean?

Well two verses - one in Psalm 22:27 and the other in Psalm 67:7 tell us that because of Christ's death for us on the cross, it's not just Jews who will be saved, just people from Israel, but people from the ends of the earth, from every nation under heaven can now trust in Christ and his death for them on the cross and they too can be saved!

We too, in this part of the world, can be part of Christ's eternal inheritance – part of that great multitude that no man can number (Revelation 7:9-10) – all we have to do is trust in Christ as Saviour.

Christ's Eternal Triumph

This is another part of God's eternal decree as far as His Son is concerned, that cannot be changed. This will happen. God says to His Son:

“You will rule them with an iron sceptre (or possibly ‘break them with a rod of iron’); You will dash them to pieces like pottery”

(This again is quoted in the NT in Revelation 12:5, 2:27, 19:15).

This is telling us that for all those that don't trust in Christ as their Saviour and Lord, and allow him to be king of their lives now, that this will be the outcome for them. Jesus Christ will be King, and on that day he is revealed to the world as King of Kings and Lord of Lords he will rule with an iron sceptre over all those who have rejected him. He will break them with his rod of iron. He will dash them to pieces like pottery. In other words he will act in fierce-some judgement on all those who have rejected him as Lord and King of their lives. This will come to pass. An awful thought for any who are still outside of Christ. And that brings us then to the last section...

4. The Exhortation of the Psalmist (vs.10-12)

We could introduce this section with Peter's question from 2 Peter 3:11 –
*'Since everything will be destroyed in this way,
what kind of people ought you to be?'*

How should we respond to all that we find in this Psalm?

Well the Psalmist tells us in v.10:

'Therefore:

Be wise you kings

Be warned you rulers of the earth'

We have been warned. Not just the kings and rulers of the earth have been warned – all of us have, to get right with the Lord while there is still time!

How do we do that? Well the Psalmist says to the kings and rulers who had become so proud, they need to humble themselves, they need to...

'Serve the Lord with fear

And rejoice with trembling'

We all need to serve the Lord with reverent fear. Acknowledge that he is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and bow down before him and allow him to be Lord of our lives. Tremble before him, yes, but when we find him as Lord and Saviour of our lives, then we can rejoice too in the joy of forgiveness and the joy that comes from knowing we are at peace with God.

But there's something else the Psalmist says in v.12:

"Kiss the Son,

*lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way,
for his wrath can flare up in a moment."*

Why this reference to a kiss? Well, we could come as subjects to a Sovereign to kiss him on the hand, and that would be right, because he is King of Kings. But we can also come as children in God's Family, with a kiss of love as well. At the back of it all many of the Psalms are love songs to Jesus, and once we have found him as our King, we can also love him as our Friend.

And so the Psalm finishes by saying:

"Blessed are all who take refuge in Him."(v.12)

So this is not just for Kings and Rulers - this is for all of us.

We will be blessed if we find our refuge in Him!