

Northolt Park Baptist Church

Psalm 2 – A Song of Victorious Coronation

Psalm 1 and Psalm 2 can be seen as the two gate-posts of the Psalms: they provide the way in to the whole book, so that we read all the Psalms that follow in the light of these two. One of the reasons Psalms 1 and 2 are put together is because there are links between them.

- Psalm 1 begins with a blessing ('blessed', 1:1) and Psalm 2 closes with a blessing ('blessed', 2:12). The words create a bracket around the two Psalms; it's a way of holding them together.

- And then, the word translated 'plot' in Psalm 2:1 is the same word often translated 'meditate' in Psalm 1:2. In fact, it's more *muttering* than meditating! But, while some people talk about God's *instruction* (1:2), others talk about *emptiness* (2:1).

- And then again, Psalm 1 ends with individuals being judged and perishing; Psalm 2 envisages *nations* perishing. Psalm 2:12 says 'you will be destroyed in your *way*'; Psalm 1:6 uses that same language when it speaks of the *way* of the wicked perishing (1:6).

But it's not just in words; it's *themes* too. We have a contrast between the righteous and the wicked in Psalm 1, and a contrast between the rebellious nations and the Lord and his king in Psalm 2. Because Psalm 2 is about the king, it is sometimes thought that the blessed person of Psalm 1 is also the king. The righteous one compared to a tree in Psalm 1 is none other than the king of Psalm 2 who, like the king is told to do in Deuteronomy 17, reads God's instruction and orders his life by it.

But there's another important way that Psalms 1 and 2 are linked, and it is that they both look to the future. Psalm 1 talks about the righteous bearing fruit and prospering; but we don't always see that, do we? In fact, some of the Psalms that follow complain that exactly the opposite seems to happen: the wicked prosper at the expense of the righteous! So, we need

Psalm 1 at the start to remind us how it will be; that whatever might or might not happen meanwhile, the wicked *will not* stand in the day of judgment; they will not have the last word; and we are encouraged that the Lord watches over the way of the righteous.

And then, when we come to Psalm 2, we have a celebration of God's kingship, that he's in charge of the whole world. And yet, again, some of the Psalms that follow seem to say that it doesn't always appear to be the case that God is in charge, that he really does reign. But once again, Psalm 2, right from the start, encourages us that however things might appear meanwhile, nations *will* be judged in the future, and 'blessed are all who take refuge in him' (2:12).

So, both Psalm 1 and Psalm 2 encourage readers that it is possible to stand firm. Even if what we know at the moment is trouble and suffering, and frustration and persecution, and sickness and death, yet the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, the Lord rules the nations, and will finally reign supreme over all.

As we turn to Psalm 2 itself, we can see that it divides nicely into four chunks of three verses each. It reads like a mini drama, with different characters speaking. In the first section, we have the nations speaking.

1. The Nations' Rebellion (1-3)

Take a look at verse 1. It may well be that we are studying Psalm 1, and read in the last verse, that 'the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish', and we might well ask a question like the one that begins Psalm 2: 'All very well, but why then do nations conspire and plot?' The picture is of nations gathering together, and muttering, talking, conspiring, plotting; but the nations are plotting in *vain*, talking rubbish, getting nowhere.

Verse 2 tells us that it's not just the nations themselves, but their kings and rulers who are doing this. They are earth's kings. So, this is not a small-scale rebellion, but the whole world working together, asserting themselves against the Lord, and against his Anointed One – which is another way of talking about the king, but the king as *anointed*, as kings were at their coronations.

The point of their gathering and raging and muttering together becomes clear in verse 3, when they speak. They want to throw off their restraints. They no longer want to be submissive to the Lord and his king; they want to do their own thing, not to serve God.

2. The Lord's Response (4-6)

How does God respond to this rebellion? Verse 4 tells us: he *laughs* at them, and he *scoffs* at them. Then he *speaks* to them and *terrifies* them (2:5). I suppose if God laughed at us, and scoffed at us, and then rebuked us, we too would be terrified!

In verse 2, he speaks of 'the kings of the *earth*', but in verse 4, he refers to the Lord as 'the One enthroned in *heaven*'. It's an important reminder that while there may be kings and rulers on the earth who think they run things, there's actually a King in heaven – and he's the one who's really in charge. No wonder he laughs as the nations and their rulers shake their tiny fists at God.

And then, just as in verses 1-3, where we have the nations described in two verses before hearing what they have to say in the third verse, so here we have the Lord described in two verses before hearing what *he* has to say in the third verse (2:6). His words in verse 6 match the rulers' words in verse 3: 'I have installed my king.' The Lord is enthroned in the heavens, and his king is installed on Zion, the mountain on which Jerusalem and the temple was built, and from where the king exercised his reign on God's behalf. And that's what the Psalm goes on to speak about...

3. The King's Reign (7-9)

Now the king himself speaks in verses 7-9. He speaks about the Lord's decree, a declaration

from the Lord himself to the king. What is this decree? We need to look at verse 7 to find out. Notice the father-son language. The king is seen as the son of God. That's very important in other passages in the Old Testament, especially in 2 Samuel 7.

If we go back to 2 Samuel 7, we discover that God promises David that his *son* will reign. David is planning to build a temple for the Lord, though as it turns out, David himself is not allowed to build it. Then Nathan says in 2 Samuel 7:11: 'The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you.' The point of this hangs on the pun of the word 'house', which could be 'house' as in dwelling-place or 'house' as in dynasty. David is told by God: 'You want to build a house (a *temple*) for me, but I will build a house (a *household*, a *dynasty*) for you.' The passage goes on to talk about the king who is God's *son*. God will punish that son if he does wrong, but he will not destroy the line itself (see 2 Samuel 7:12-16).

The father-son language is thus found in 2 Samuel 7, and in Psalm 2:7 the phrase, 'today 'I have become your father' refers to an appointment, an *enthronement* of God's 'son' – the king – over the nation. This is the *coronation* of the king as the son of God who rules his father's realm as his regent.

The king speaks about his *identity* in verse 7, and then he speaks about his *destiny* in verses 8 and 9, and these are extravagant promises God makes to his son. The anointed king on Mount Zion, God's son no less, mediates God's kingship to the people, and to the nations too. Because, as God's son, he is entrusted with God's inheritance: one day all the nations of the earth will belong to him, and he will rule over them, bringing God's victory against all his enemies.

4. The Psalmist's Recommendation (10-12)

Given all this, what does the Psalmist recommend? There is still time, it appears; the final rule has not yet come. So, what are the kings to do? Verse 10 tells them: be wise. How are the kings to be wise? They are to be wise by accepting the warning that comes to them (2:10).

They are to serve the Lord (2:11). Leaders – serving! They are to serve with reverence, with fear. And they are to rejoice with trembling as well – a combination of joy and awe. Service, reverence, joy, and trembling, it seems go together as appropriate responses – wise responses – to God.

They serve, and they submit to the Lord too. Submission instead of rebellion. That comes out in verse 12. We need to understand that kissing would not be kissing the face, or the hand, but the feet; kissing the feet of the son, or possibly the *ground* in front of the son, as an act of submission.

And so we come back to where we found ourselves at the end of Psalm 1, with its two ways of living and its two destinies. Those who rebel will perish, and those who take refuge in God will live and be blessed (2:12).

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Of course, it has to be admitted, Israel often found themselves under the authority of some higher power. In that sense, the language of the Psalm is over the top. There was no time, even at their height, when Israel ruled an empire the size spoken of in the Psalm. But it invites us to *imagine* a situation like that, to imagine a *kingdom* like that, to imagine a *king* like that.

It's song of victorious coronation. But who do we sing about now? Not some earthly king or ruler, of course, but our Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, it's not too difficult for us to make that leap, because the New Testament does it for us! It's there when God speaks at Jesus' baptism, declaring him to be his Son (Mark 1:11). It's there when the apostles are coming to terms with the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection in the early church (see Acts 4:24-28; 13:32-33).

So, for a Christian, Psalm 2 becomes a lens through which I see the world. If I stopped at Psalm 1, I might be tempted to think that the Psalms are only interested in individual lives of faith, but because I look at life through the lens of Psalm 2, I understand that God is concerned about the world of international politics. If I'm a Christian, and I look at life through the lens of Psalm 2, I understand that and live my life by it.

Who rules the world? Is it kings and rulers? No, Psalm 2 is clear that it is the Lord. If I'm a Christian, and I look at life through the lens of Psalm 2, I understand that and live my life by it.

Okay, *when* does he rule world? Well, his rule is effective *now*, but will be supremely shown in the *future*. If I'm a Christian, and I look at life through the lens of Psalm 2, I understand that and live my life by it.

How does God bring about this victorious rule? According to the New Testament, through the victory of Jesus' death and resurrection. If I'm a Christian, and I look at life through the lens of Psalm 2, I understand that and live my life by it.

If we see the world through Psalm 2, we want to call people everywhere to be wise and to submit to the Christ, the Lord's Anointed One. We want ourselves to be true subjects of the king, serving the Lord with fear, rejoicing with trembling, taking refuge in him, and finding ourselves blessed. Amen.

Notes from a sermon preached by Antony Billington at Northolt Park Baptist Church on 20 January 2008.