

Prayers

To God

Pray with the minimum of words; place yourself at God's disposal and let Him speak to you His words of grace and challenge.

For myself

Pray about your feelings; whatever you feel like today, place this before God. Ask Him to help you understand your feelings and especially how and why certain things cause you pain or difficulty. Do not be controlled by such things but by the love of God.

For others

Weekly theme: The press

Lord Jesus Christ, we live in a complex world in which some have the power to report what happens in newspapers and on the internet, and in this way affect how people understand their country and their world. May we not be so blind as to ignore the power of the press and media, but give us the courage to weigh up all it offers us in the light of the Word. May we persist in judging this world according to the wisdom of Your Gospel, and may we stand for truth in a world too often dominated by corruption and lies. AMEN.

Meditation

What is the truth behind Your love, O Lord?
A love which made the world and chose a people,
Led a broken nation through the desert;
Spoke through the lives of kings and prophets,
And wept and bled when all seemed lost through sin.

But then it triumphed in a plan of unsurpassed beauty,
Sending Christ, Your Son, into our world to save the lost;
A man who took the world's rejection on the Cross,
That good might conquer death and claim love's victory,
And prove to all the world the timeless moral truth
That its best and only hope is in its Saviour!

It is a love that only finds a home in you and me,
Because our past and present make us ever lost
Unless we place our future's hope in Him
Who longs, in love, to be at home in us.

Bible Passage

Psalm 2

- ¹ *Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?*
- ² *The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the LORD and against His anointed, saying,*
- ³ *'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!*
- ⁵ *Then He will speak to them in his wrath,
and terrify them in His fury, saying,*
- ⁶ *'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.*
- ⁸ *Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.*
- ⁹ *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.*
- ¹¹ *Serve the LORD with fear,
and rejoice with trembling.*
- ¹² *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.*

Review

Psalm 2 is a rousing psalm in which we read about the Lord quashing rebellion against Him by sending His Son to rule in Zion! This is a glorious example of the Old Testament's answer to the ills of the world, and it speaks prophetically of the coming of Christ. As such, it is a psalm that has received a great deal of attention over the years; but we will get the most from it if we try and understand what it meant to those who first used it, then allow it to speak to us of Jesus, and then finally apply it to ourselves today.

This psalm is quite different the one we read yesterday. Principally, where Psalm 1 was about the individual and God, Psalm 2 is about the nations, and God. In sequence, it describes conflict between nations and the Lord (2:1-3), the enthronement of God's Son as King in Zion (2:4-6), the Lord's commission of His servant, the king (2:7-9) and God's warning to the nations to pay homage to the King in Zion (2:10-12).

Now, this may not appear to have much in common with Psalm 1, but we will find that it does. Psalm 1 presents people with a choice between two 'ways', the righteous way of the Lord or the way of sinners with each having clear consequences. In a similar way, Psalm 2 presents

nations with two pathways, again, with equally clear consequences; they can either rebel against the Lord and his 'anointed', and incur His wrath (2:3f.), or they can serve Him with fear and trembling (2:11) and receive His blessing (2:12). This sounds straightforward when put like this, but despite the framework to the psalm, it is not always easy to follow it. In particular, it is not easy to work out, verse by verse, exactly who is talking to whom, and about what. Try reading the psalm and asking yourself the question, who is 'speaking'? Now it is traditional to assume that David wrote the psalms, but while many of the psalms begin with a reference to David, this one does not. We must explore with an open mind.

We will start by trying to imagine the circumstances in which this psalm may have been written. The phrase '*I have set my King in Zion*' (2:6) suggests the enthronement of a King, perhaps David, who is given the title '*the Lord's anointed*' (2:2), a common title for the king of Israel of various generations, most commonly between the time of David (around 1000 years BC) and the Exile (587BC). The enthronement of a King was an important part of the life of Israel, because the King was a descendant of David and visible evidence of God's blessing on His people. He was expected to maintain the peace and security of the land and to prevent the surrounding nations from attacking the country. This is clearly reflected in verses 2 to 4.

However, the psalm is about more than this, and the title '*the Lord's anointed*' (2:2) may mean other things. For example, there was no king in Jerusalem for considerable periods of Israel's history, such as after the exile in 587BC and from then until almost the time of Christ. Without a King, the Israelites had to interpret this psalm differently, and in the centuries before Christ they came to believe that it was about the 'Messiah'. He was believed to be God's 'Anointed One', who would come to liberate His people and rule over them just as David had done. For them, this Psalm described how their Messiah would subdue the nations and protect God's people, like other kings who had been great sons 'of David' (see 2:7,12). Then, in the Christian era, the people of the early church quickly saw connections between this psalm and Jesus. They read the psalm as a prophecy of Christ's coming Kingdom, of His return in glory and His ultimate rule over all the nations and all the world.

With all this in mind, it becomes easier to interpret the psalm. It begins with the question '*why do the nations rage?*' (2:1) and this is asked by the Lord who sits in heaven. He sits in authority over all the earth and all the nations and '*holds them in derision*' (2:4) for their rebellion against His authority and rule. He mocks the plotting of the nations because He alone has all authority, indeed, as Paul says in the New Testament, God has given the nations their authority, but they do not recognise this (Romans 13:f.)!

God He then tells the nations that He will set His 'King' (2:6) in authority over them. It is now easy to see that although the ancient Israelites thought this referred to their King, later generations believed this was their Messiah, and we now believe that this indeed is Jesus. Then, in verse 7 to 9 we read God's promises to His anointed One. In the same way, these were once thought to be God's promise of authority to the King in Jerusalem, but later generations read this as God's promise to defend His people through the Messiah. And they now remind us of God's promise to Jesus at His baptism (2:7) and also of the authority He will have over the nations when He comes again.

Lastly, verses 10 to 12 have a clear message, addressed to whatever period of history you have in mind, whether ancient Israel, the Jewish people of later times, or the Christian church today. They challenge other 'nations' to accept God's authority and rule, and the psalm issues a powerful proclamation, inviting people to worship Him and take refuge in Him (2:12). This is almost a 'Gospel' message in an Old Testament 'nutshell'! But typically of the Old Testament, it also warns people that ignoring this invitation is to invite disaster.

Psalm 2 is a stirring proclamation of God's rule in this world, which stands above all time. In the past, he ruled through David and his descendants, and now He rules through Jesus Christ

His Son, and He calls the whole world to recognise this authority. The world carries on as it will, but one day, it will face this ultimate authority in fear and trembling!

Discipleship

Application

Prophecy in the psalms

People see very different things within this psalm, though most Christians think of Jesus as God's 'Son', especially where God's Son is mentioned in verse 7. I think it can be very helpful to think of this psalm however as prophetic, speaking of things that are yet to be. Of course, the original psalm was written for Israel and her kings, but it still speaks to us today about the ultimate future and God's eternal authority and rule. We should not think of prophecy as something that is limited to the great Old Testament prophets or to the early church after the coming of the Holy Spirit. Wherever God's Word is communicated effectively through worship, songs, poems and other arts, it has more to say to us than we imagine and we need to have our eyes and ears open to all the possibilities.

Victory over all evil

I have found that the Old Testament has always been a source of inspiration to me because of the way it describes God's ultimate victory over evil; despite so many problems experienced by the people of Israel, their prophets always spoke about God's victory. I have also met other Christians who have found it hard to think in those terms and believe that it is inappropriate for us to have such confidence, they say that it sounds too 'triumphalist'. Over the years, however, I have not been able to find any good scriptural reason to hold back from believing in Christ's victory. There is of course no need for us to be arrogant in our manner when talking about the things of God, but unless we believe that the Creator of the world will indeed be victorious over all evil, then it seems to me that the Gospel is incomplete. Jesus' death is a triumph not a disaster!

Ideas for what to do

- This Psalm challenges us to identify with our Christian heritage going back through Jesus into Old Testament times. Read through the psalm and think about what it meant for people of past generations, and consider what can be learned from their experiences.
- Pray for the church of God and ask the Lord to help it declare the truths it has been given, especially about the ultimate victory of good over evil. This is a fundamentally Christian message that needs to be proclaimed whether we like it or not.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. In what ways do nations, philosophies and religions today reject God, and what does this Psalm say about this rejection?
2. How does Jesus Christ fulfil this psalm, and how may we, as His followers, interpret what this psalm says now?

3. Psalm 2 describes 'taking refuge' in Him (2:12). What does this phrase mean to you?

Final Prayer

Speak to me Lord in the quiet moments offered by this day. Touch me when I need to be reminded to turn to You and choose Your way. Encourage me to exercise the gifts and graces You have given me, as a child of God. Walk beside me all the way, Your wisdom ever present in what I do and say; AMEN
