

Psalm 2: Jesus Our Refuge

Stephen Kasun | Psalm 2

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I think a staple value today is forging your own path. Creating your own way. Defining yourself, and for yourself what you want or need out of life. In career and work, for thousands of years, it would be normal for you to do what your father or mother did. Your dad was a butcher, you'd become a butcher. A carpenter, you'd become a carpenter. But now we choose for ourselves what purpose we give ourselves in a career. Or we go to college and put off that decision, or change that decision.

This need to self define, as with much of western culture, has crept it's way into western evangelicalism and Christianity. There is a tendency and need to elevate ourselves, what we want, who we want to be, higher than we ought. Often times that elevation can rise about the definition of purpose that God has for the Christian life.

Today's Psalm is going to talk about rebellion and submission. Both as regards the Lord. Rebellion to the rule and reign of God, and submission to the Lordship and friendship of Jesus.

We can feel caught in the middle of culture and God. A culture that demands that we forge our own paths and define for ourselves what is good and right, and God who created humanity with a distinct purpose to live in submission to his rule. Amidst that struggle, this is what we will see in Psalm 2 today:

Jesus is our only Refuge

1. **The Vanity of Rebellion**
2. **The Blessing of Submission**

In the first half, the first two movements of Psalm 2 we see the **The Vanity of Rebellion**. Read with me, **Psalm 2:1-6**. There are two things happening here, each movement has its own focus. The first, verses 1-3 David points out a people that have risen up in opposition to God and his people. And in the second movement we see God's response to that rebellion.

It's the first three verses I want to focus on, in those three verses we see **The Nations Rage**. What we see here is some kind of coalition united against God and his people, Israel. This Psalm was written by King David. It's not titled in this Psalm like many are, but in Acts 4, Luke attributes this writing to King David.

The people of Israel have a complicated relationship with the rest of the ancient world in the OT. At many times under many nations they were subjected to the rule of other nations, sometimes even slavery. And sometimes they were a sovereign, independent nation, ruled Kings anointed by God. This psalm arrives at a moment of independence, as David laments the rise of an international coalition of monarchs, bent on the destruction of God's people, and the worship of the God of Abraham.

All throughout the Old Testament there is constant conflict between the people of Israel and all the nations around them. Something kind of interesting here, we see a unity in the distaste for God's people. "The rulers take counsel together", these nations that themselves worship different gods, with their own disputes over land and economics, their own dislike for each other, often hate for one another; have unified together with a singular purpose. That unity is built entirely on hating God and Israel.

It's hard to get people to unify, isn't it? Look at politics today, two sides can barely talk to each other without a heated and hostile exchange. Sports. We live in Missoula. If you have something nice to say about MSU, some might say you aren't a true Missoulian.

But I think an awesome example of what's happening in Psalm 2 is international soccer. There is a thing in soccer called hooliganism. Basically it's just sports fanaticism taken to the extreme. We have moments of hooliganism in American sports too, but the word itself is born in English soccer. In the last century there have been many instances of actual violence and fighting, not among the players on the pitch, but among rival fans in the stands, and in pubs and bars. Especially when one London area team would play another London team from a different area.

Now if you dropped into one of those moments, it would be farfetched to see the two sides working together for anything in that moment. But as soon as international soccer kicks off for say the world cup, both sets of fans could be arm in arm cheering, rooting, and hugging each other over the English national team. It took something bigger than their neighborhood and local allegiances, to unify them against a common enemy.

That is what is happening here in Psalm 2. These nations hated God and Israel so much, that they were willing to set aside their own wars in order to unify in the destruction of Israel. They hated the idea of one God ruling all so much, that they set aside their own violent disagreements about religion, that they might annihilate the God of Abraham.

But look at verse 3 again. Because it isn't just the destruction of the two, the destruction of God and of Israel, it's separation of the two from each other. **Psalm 2:3.**

This united coalition that hates God so much, isn't only interested in destroying the nation of Israel, rather they want to separate Israel from their God. They want to break the bond and cast the chords away, the chords that bind the relationship between God and his people. They want to sever the connection between Israel and the God of Israel. Which is why you see King Nebuchadnezzar, in the book of Daniel, outlaw the worship, praise, and prayer to the God of Israel. Because the only true King that could exist was Nebuchadnezzar himself.

It's hard for us to identify with the violence of that experience. But it sure isn't hard to identify with the spirit of it. A culture that rejects the idea of one God ruling all? A culture that wants you to leave your faith at the door when you enter a public school, or a voting booth, or a political or policy discussion? A culture that rejects biblical morality and instead through pop culture and entertainment celebrates an abandonment of morality? A culture that rejects not only the truth of God's word, but rejects very idea of objective truth altogether?

The separation of church and state didn't originate in this country with a supreme court decision. Nor is rejection of transcendent spirituality and religion a unique product of postmodernism. The separation of God from people has been an active and often violent mission of sinners since the fall in Genesis 3. Rebellion against God, his people, and his word isn't a new thing, it isn't an old thing, it's just a thing. An ever present reality this side of eternity.

As, depressing, as my tone may be right now, did you notice David's tone in the opening of the Psalm? **Psalm 2:1.** Vain. He calls this coalition of unified rebels vain. The struggle against separating Israel from their God vanity. China's struggle against removing Christianity from its people's vanity. Academies struggle to keep Jesus at the door of the classroom vanity.

Look at what David says as he begins the second movement of Psalm 2. **Psalm 2:4-6 God's Faithful Rule.** There can be this idea in western evangelicalism. That God is love...and only love. A cuddly, warm, inoffensive view of God that only chooses to see and focus on the God that accepts all people, no matter their past, no matter their path in life, God is here for you. It doesn't matter what you've done or what you will do. Jesus loves you.

That is true. Unequivocally. If you repent, if you turn from the unified rebellion that you are participating in, and humbly, fall on your knees before the cross of Jesus. But if not, "he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury..." It is important that we focus on the redemptive work of Jesus, that we focus on the grace, mercy and forgiveness of God. But grace, mercy and forgiveness are only necessary, in light of God's wrath against sin and rebellion and evil and unrighteousness.

In our parenting?

God is still God, whether these nations rise against him, or accept him as yahweh. That's why David paint his picture of God's laughter. Because God is above it all. No matter his big these nations think they can be. No matter how high they think they can build a tower. No matter how great anyone can grow in the eyes of the world, there is one God, one creator, one who sits above it all on a throne, with infinite power and perfect rule. Blissful ignorance, obstinate rebellion, or humble submission, God is still God.

And that God is faithful, and merciful. **Psalm 2:5-6.** God is faithful to uphold his people. In the face of overwhelming odds, in the face of stronger armies, larger armies, more vicious and violent people. God has set his King. His anointed. And he will not be moved. David's confidence. His unshakable reliance on God. A reliance that makes sense. See faith is not blind, it isn't baseless. God and Israel have a history. A history of Israel failing and God still delivering.

The irony of the nations rising against Israel and the God is Israel, is that time and time again, Israel would rise against, rebel and reject God themselves. Part of the cycle you will notice in the OT, Israel's subjugation under other nations is often a result of their rejection of God. Who they would continue to ignore, until he would deliver them and promise to protect them, and they would return in worship.

Several times God would make covenants with his people. He would promise to protect them and make them flourish, and they would commit to worshipping him and promise to obey his commands.

And time and time again, from generation to generation, God's people would break their covenant with God, and the inevitable result would be a conquest and subjugation. And yet, time and time again, God would redeem them. God would rescue and restore them.

The nature of a covenant is two way. As soon as it is broken on one end, it ceases to bind the other. So it was not an obligation that kept God restoring his people. It was not a self bound pact or agreement. The faithful rule of God. He is who he says he is, and he will do what he says he will do.

And as we arrive at the second half of Psalm 2, we see **The Blessing of Submission**. Where the first half of this song was futility of raging and warring against the rule and reign of God, this half is the beautiful reality of bringing oneself in submission to the Lord with joy and obedience. **Psalm 2:7-12**.

Again this half has two movements. In the first we see a decree by God. These verses have a significant place in not only the Psalms but the whole of God's word. These verses are quoted numerous times in the NT. This movement then, even David saw, has a scope beyond the historical circumstances of David. **A Better King**.

One thing that's helpful for us, is reading God's word in the OT with a redemptive lense. That is reading with a view of the gospel of Jesus as the backdrop for all of history. Because so much of the OT contains these conflicts and wars and skirmishes, all of which represent a much larger spiritual conflict, and an even larger redemption. If we don't hold the cross in view as we read the OT, many text, some like this, can read more like a cheesy action film than the history of redemption and grace.

Psalm, Proverbs, 1 & 2 Kings, all of it points forward to the gospels and work of Jesus. All the proof we need of that is the simple fact that Psalm 2 is one of the most quoted psalms in the NT.

With that in mind, look at what is happening here historically. David and Israel are going to crush their enemies by the hand of God. **Psalm 2:7-9**. God is going to deliver military and political victory over their enemies, they are going to "break" their enemies with a "rod of iron", and "dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." All, presumably, against the odds.

We like underdog stories don't we? The story of Israel is often the story of underdogs. David's established their current predicament, this unified coalition of hatred bent on their destruction, wanting to sever their right to worship. Israel as a small nation. Once enslaved. Once with no home, no land to call their own. An underdog. And God declares he will give them a decisive victory over a stronger, more populated enemy. God has decreed it. David believes it.

What could this mean for us? 21st century believers, as we apply this to our own circumstances? Well, it's these three verses that are most quoted in the NT.

The clear commentary of God's own Word tells us that these verses point to something far more than the anointing of a King over Israel three thousand years ago. That's a good thing, a really good thing. As God's people have established, they aren't exactly the most faithful group of people. The next five Psalms, 3-7, are all about the weakness of David, the consequences of his sin, his lament and crying out to God for deliverance and help.

Acts 13:32-33

Hebrews 1:5

Hebrews 5:5

Jesus as the true and better Adam. Jesus as the anointed King over all of God's people. Even for David there was something greater. There is an anointed king that would never flee nor fail. There is a great high priest who would represent God's people. There is a perfect lamb that would stand as a substitution and representative for the sinner.

It can be really hard for us. To read texts like this, and really try and feel what David felt. There are a lot of Christians today that can though, right? Brothers and sisters in North Korea, brothers and sisters in Iran, the Middle East. Christians in China. In 2021 the most martyrs have actually been in Africa this year. That is Christians killed exclusively because they held to name of Jesus. Living in those countries, they could feel this. It's not hard to empathize with this text, when your government will literally kill you or imprison you should you openly worship the God of the Bible, hold a Christian church service, or try and tell anyone about King Jesus.

But for us? Getting weird looks in the break room because you pray over your lunch. Some awkward conversations when you're getting to know your co-workers. The fear of, what will my professor think if he finds out I believe that God created all this. And there is some institutional stress on our faith. Workplaces where you aren't allowed to share your faith while on the clock. Spaces where we do risk social capital should we discuss our commitment to a biblical morality. But hold those two realities side by side. We are insulated from overt persecution, insulated from oppression and systematic violence based solely on the status Christian. It's hard for us to get it.

I think that's in part due to misplacing ourselves when we read this. We want to be David. Or Israel. God's people up against God's enemies. And that may be true. But we miss a crucial part of our experience. We were actually, all of us, at one time or now, on the other side of the battlefield, the unified rebels. Standing against God. **Romans 5:8-10.**

You and I are or were the enemies of God. You and I were unified in our mutual distaste for submission to the God of the Bible. For every Christian in here, we all have a story. A testimony of our life before Jesus, and that experience of redemption. Where we transition from an enemy of God, to an adopted child of inheritance. Like the enemies of God, mine is one of being shattered into pieces like a potter's vessel. Mine is one of sin, and shame, and overt rejection of a God that cares. Left broken before a worthless life, littered around me the remnants of false hopes, pretend refuges, and empty promises.

The way to feel this psalm, isn't to try and walk in the shoes of David, or a Christian in North Korea, it's to walk in our own shoes, to see the painful and yet wonderful reality I was an enemy, yet now adopted by God himself. A co-heir with King Jesus. You and I no longer need fear the wrath of God, the fury of his justice, the iron rod of his righteousness, because though we were broken we've been put back together, given a renewed purpose.

We can respond like we ought. And David gives us that picture in the final movement **Psalm 2:10-12. Our Submission and Refuge.** We can serve the Lord with awe, and rejoice with trembling. The holy kiss of submission to Jesus will not be rejected, but received with friendship as a fellow heir to the same promises David and the rest of God's people can look forward to.

No longer do I need to fear the wrath of God, or his judgement or his fury, because Jesus took it all. Because, "Blessed are all who take refuge in him." Him who endured. Him who secured. Him who was begotten. Him who was crucified. Him who was poured out the wrath that I deserved. Jesus is the protagonist of this story. Not David. Not Israel. Not you or I in their place. Jesus.

This changes how we see the enemies. If we recognize our experience as once the enemies of God, how much more empathy, how much more love could that inspire as you look across the battlefield at a culture that despises Jesus? At a coworker that doesn't know what to say. At a classmate who always wants to argue. At a family member that refuses to engage over faith or religion. It changes doesn't it.

Not longer are they *others*. Because that was just you apart from the miraculous world of the Spirit of God in your soul. How different might our interactions and relationships be, if we stopping thinking about them and them. Rather as no different than I, apart from the grace of the Lord Jesus.

The truth is, the enemies of God and David had much to fear. They willfully rejected a God that would constrain them, and rather worshiped gods of their own making that would free them. God's of war, violence and conflict. gods of fertility, passion, sex, and intimacy. Gods of wealth, prosperity and plenty. God's that let then determine for themselves what was to be.

To those that stand opposed. Maybe in this room, proudly against the tide of religion and Christianity and some imagination in the clouds. You are not unique. As un-pc as that is to say in 2021. You stand numbered with millions, billions of people throughout history, that have rejected, opposed, and warred against the God of the universe. A vain struggle. For you, it is appropriate to fear, and be terrified at the wrath, justice, and judgement of a perfect God. Consider that you might be wrong. What then?

Because I suspect that it isn't a lack of evidence you find unconvincing. It's the submission to someone other than yourself that you reject. You cherish the freedom of living life as you see fit. Defining good and morality as you desire. You reject the submission to a God that would constrain, and maybe even change those desires. It is likely your will that you chose to reject God, not your mind.

Take the words of men undoubtedly better at thinking, writing and communicating than any in this room:

Blaise Pascal, the 17th century French mathematician, "**People almost invariably arrive at their beliefs not on the basis of proof but on the basis of what they find attractive.**"

And one of the great atheists, Friedrich Neitzsche, **“If one were to prove this God of the Christians to us, we should be even less able to believe in him.”**

How true is that for you? Because as I assess my own history of rebellion and hatred toward God, those words could not have been truer. But the good news for me. The good news for all of us, “Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”