

Sermon 5, Christ the Son, the King, Psalm 2

Proposition: The nations rage against God's rule, but the setting of Christ His Son as King in Zion will cause their rebellious way to perish and bring them all under His perfect rule.

- I. The Royal Rage to Throw Off Christ's Yoke, vv. 1-3
 - A. Nations, Peoples, Kings, Rulers United Against Christ, v. 1-2
 - B. The Wicked's Counsel Is Against Christ, v. 2
 - C. The Wicked Think Christ Ties them Up, v. 3
- II. God's Response, vv. 4-9
 - A. To Set up His King, vv. 4-6
 1. God's Laughing Fury, v. 4-5
 2. God's Speaking Fury, v. 5
 3. God's King, Who Is His Christ, v. 6
 4. Zion Is the Church, Where Christ Reigns, v. 6
 - B. To Give the Nations to His Son, vv. 7-9
 1. Christ's Speech, which Is the Father's, vv. 7-9
 2. The Son, Eternally Begotten, v. 7
 3. The Son, Prayer Warrior, v. 8
 4. The Son, Heir of the World, v. 8
 5. The Son, Possessor of Heaven and Earth, v. 8
 6. The Son, Breaker of Nations, v. 9
- III. The Psalmist's Warning to Kings & Judges, vv. 10-12
 - A. Be Wise
 - B. Be Instructed
 - C. Serve Yahweh with Joyful Fear
 - D. Kiss the Son of God
 - E. Beware of His Sudden Anger
- IV. The Blessing that Comes from Taking Refuge in Christ!, v. 12c

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we gather this evening to hear the word of God from the second psalm. You have just heard how the apostles quoted this psalm in prayer in Acts 4, declaring that it was fulfilled in the actions of Herod and Pilate, who crucified Jesus Christ. But here's the thing: this psalm was indeed climactically fulfilled in the events of Christ's passion. But it is also an ongoing reality, and the story it tells will remain true until that day when the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ. If you want to know what the deeper dynamic of history is, read this psalm. It explains that the history of the world is, at the deepest level, the story of the kings of the earth rebelling against Yahweh and His

Christ. It also tells us that God's answer to that rebellion is not to hurl lightning bolts at them, but to hand things over to His King, who is also His Son. Anointed to reign from Mt. Zion, the Son will deal with the rebellious nations and put them in their place. That is the basic plotline of world history; we do not yet see it fulfilled, but we do see Jesus, made for a little while lower than the angels but crowned with glory and honor. So let's dive into this psalm, where we will see that the nations rage against God's rule, but the setting of Christ His Son as King in Zion will cause their rebellious way to perish and bring them all under His perfect rule.

I. The Royal Rage to Throw Off Christ's Yoke, vv. 1-3

We begin by looking at the world situation as outlined in the opening verses of the psalm.

A. Nations, Peoples, Kings, Rulers United Against Christ, v. 1-2

The picture is grim. There is none who understands, none who seeks after God. They have all together become unprofitable. Indeed, so far are they from seeking God that their main goal is to throw off His yoke. They rage, and they plot. This is the most salient characteristic of nations and peoples. No matter the culture or the national identity, the kingdoms of the earth are united in their enmity to God and to His Christ. As in the gospels, when Herod and Pilate (former enemies) become fast friends through their mutual opposition to Christ, so here, a thousand years prior, the enmity of every nation and people toward Christ unites them in hatred. They rage, and they plot. They imagine a post-Christian or even non-Christian future, a world in which God does not reign and His Son is not in charge. Notice that this is both a top-down and bottom-up movement. Nations and peoples are moved against the Lord's Anointed: that is the bottom-up feature. The rulers and the kings — top-down—are equally opposed to Him. Both together reject the Son of God. The history of all hitherto existing society is not the history of class struggle, but of classes unified across socio-economic boundaries in rage against the rule of the Son of God.

B. The Wicked's Counsel Is Against Christ, v. 2

Now, Psalm 1 mentioned the counsel of the wicked in a general way; Psalm 2 tells us specifically what that counsel is. It is counsel against Yahweh and His Christ. The rulers have summits where they brainstorm ways to throw off the yoke of the Son of God.

One would almost call it a "conspiracy theory," except for the loaded baggage that term carries. But whatever you call it, the psalmist believes — and the apostles believed after him — that there is a desire to throw off the rule of God the Father and His Anointed Son latent in the breast of every human being, and patent in the behavior of nations, peoples, kings, and rulers around the earth. From the micro-scale, the commission of tiny little sins, to the macro-scale, where whole empires outlaw Christian worship and ban the teachings of Jesus, the powers that be are walking in the counsel of the wicked. They are the wicked, and they are counseling each other regarding how to be rid of the Kingdom of God.

C. The Wicked Think Christ Ties them Up, v. 3

The way they speak of this is illuminating. The wicked think that Christ ties them up. They speak of His "bands" and "cords." In their book, Christ is like the villain in an old Western TV show. He is trying to tie them up and leave them incapacitated until their friends find and rescue them.

Now, does God tie people up? No. Jesus does speak of coming under His yoke and learning from Him, and Jeremiah also speaks of the wicked breaking the yoke and bursting the bonds. But to say that God has tied you up through His Son is slander, pure and simple. God actually frees us — from our sin, from His curse, from our desires to wreak havoc on our own well-being, and from the need to justify ourselves to ourselves and to the world. “For freedom Christ has set you free.” “Where the Spirit of the LORD is, there is liberty.” But the wicked deny that, and despise it. In their mind, freedom requires the death or at least the overthrow of God, and bringing it about is exactly what they seek to accomplish.

Before we move on too quickly to God’s response, let me just challenge you: Have you felt this way? Have you wished God dead so that you could be free to sin? Have you sought to fulfill your own desires in a way that is free from His oversight? Of course you have. Something that the nations, peoples, kings and rulers do is something we do too — even when we disapprove, when we know we shouldn’t, we still fall prey to it. So read and beware. The nations set themselves against Christ. Don’t you go join them.

II. God’s Response, vv. 4-9

What is God’s response to this nonsense, this rage that cuts across classes and cultures? Really, God’s response takes up both of the stanzas at the core of the psalm. It has two elements. He responds to the nations’ rage by setting up His king, and He also responds to it by giving the nations to His Son. The King on Zion who will inherit the nations is God’s response to the nations’ rage.

A. To Set up His King, vv. 4-6

1. God’s Laughing Fury, v. 4-5

The psalm first narrates God’s response, and then quotes His additional response. The first thing the Almighty does about the nations’ rage is to laugh.

That’s right — the one who sits in the heavens just bursts out laughing at the sheer absurdity of the nations thinking that they will throw off Him and His Anointed. There is no wisdom, no understanding, no counsel against the LORD. They may be gathering and taking counsel together against Him, but there is absolutely no point. Just as we cannot consider building a tower that doesn’t rest on the ground, so we cannot consider attacking the Omnipotent One. If He can do absolutely anything, then He can crush the mightiest of human rebellions without so much as raising His little finger.

But don’t mistake the laugh for a tolerant attitude. God’s laugh is not delighted, but scornful. His laughter mocks them; He holds them in derision. In fact, His laughter is simply the voice of His anger. That’s right — He responds to them with rage. He has a form of laughing fury.

I don’t want to listen to the mocking laughter of the Almighty, not when it’s directed at me and my people. But guess what’s in store for everyone attempting to shrug off the confines of God’s law? Right. He’s laughing at them, but He is also angry at them. They are the targets of His laughing fury.

2. God's Speaking Fury, v. 5

But His fury does not end with a mocking laugh. He then begins to speak, and that is, if possible, even more terrifying than His laughter was. Why? Because His words reveal His attitude, His rage.

Do you dare defy the Omnipotent to arms? I don't. I hate my sin; I want to flee from it. And when I think about provoking God's wrath, I want to flee even faster away from my sin.

God speaks in His fury.

3. God's King, Who Is His Christ, v. 6

And in His fury, He utters the words that indicate that He will utterly destroy their rebellion. The words don't sound angry; there is nothing spittle-flecked about this or any other pronouncement made by the Almighty. But in these words is the kind of threat that should freeze the blood of anyone sold out to his pleasures. That threat is the threat posed by the reign of Jesus Christ. God's Christ-Son-King is the ultimate solution to the problem of the nations raging and the peoples imagining a vain thing. God's King, who is His Anointed, who is His Son, is going to end the rage of the wicked.

4. Zion Is the Church, Where Christ Reigns, v. 6

But not only has He set up His King; God specifically names the location where His king is. That location is Zion.

What is Zion? It is a poetic name for Jerusalem, and specifically for the mountain in Jerusalem on which the temple was built. The word appears 162 times in the Bible, and in Bible-adjacent places like Mormon Utah. Why does Psalm 2 specify that the Father set His Son to reign on Zion? Because Zion is the center of Israel's religious life. It's the place where the temple was built and sacrifices were offered. The bottom line is that Christ reigns in the worship of His people, today no longer centered in Jerusalem but instead distributed through all nations. To be brief, Zion is the church, where Christ reigns. Just as His presence was uniquely concentrated in the temple of Zion in the days when Psalm 2 was written, so now it is uniquely concentrated in the assembly of the people of God wherever it takes place. So when the Father says that His Son reigns in Zion, that means that Jesus Christ reigns in the church. As the Larger Catechism puts it, "Christ executeth the office of a king, in calling out of the world a people to himself, and giving them officers, laws, and censures, by which he visibly governs them" (WLC 45). Where is the reign of Christ? As Mediator, it is first and foremost in the church. He reigns over us; when you joined the church, you promised to submit to His rule. God's rule through His Son in the church is the first part of His answer to the rage of the nations.

I think many of us sort of expect the psalm to cut from v. 5 to v. 9, as though God's primary answer to the rebellion of the nations is going to be to smash them with a rod of iron so that they no longer rebel. But instead, His first answer is to set up Christ to reign in Zion, in the church.

B. To Give the Nations to His Son, vv. 7-9

The second part of His answer is to give the nations to His Son.

1. Christ's Speech, which Is the Father's, vv. 7-9

I want you to notice about this speech that the first few words are said by the Son, but that the rest of it is a block quote from . . . the Father. The quote graphically illustrates that the Son's speech is the Father's, or, better, that the Son is the Word of the Father who perfectly says all that comes from the Father, and nothing else.

If you hear Jesus Christ speaking, you are hearing the Father speak. The words that He speaks do not come from Himself, but from His Father, just as Christ does not come from Himself, but from His Father.

The Son will tell of the decree. As we see in Revelation 5, He alone is worthy to open the scroll and read the decrees of God. No one else is fit for such a task. But when He reads them, He tells of them — at least, of the most important of them, which is that He is the Son of the Father.

Again, when we think of the rebellious nations, we probably think that the best solution is to break out the iron rod and start smashing away. It's something of a commonplace in certain circles that the best foreign policy approach is simple: "Nuke 'em." That's what we want God to do, particularly when the wicked are hurting us more than usual.

But that's not God's first response. Rather, His first response is to beget His Son.

2. The Son, Eternally Begotten, v. 7

That's what the decree is, or at least where it begins: "You are my Son; today I have begotten you." This day is the day of eternity; it's not that the Father began to beget, was in the middle of begetting, and then finished begetting, all within a fixed period of time. No. When He says "today I have begotten you" He means every day. The Father is begetting the Son now. What does that mean? It means that the being, power, holiness, and every other perfection of the Father is constantly waterfalling, spilling in unlimited amounts, into the Son. He is "continuously and completely filled," as Ephesians puts it. It's not that the Father gave Himself to His Son once and then let Him go; rather, He is giving Himself to His Son constantly — now, always, and to the day of eternity.

How does the eternal generation of the Son relate to His rule over the rebellious nations? Well, the next verse tells us.

3. The Son, Prayer Warrior, v. 8

The Son not only has received but is even now receiving all that He has and is from the Father. Thus, when the Father tells Him to ask, He is not telling Him to do anything different than what He is already doing. The Son is the recipient of all that the Father has to give — and thus, to ask for the nations is nothing strange. It is simply another step along the path that begins with the Father's begetting of the Son. As the Father loves the Son and has given everything into His hands, so the Father loves the Son and will give Him the nations too.

Because He knows that He receives everything from the Father, the Son is the ultimate prayer warrior who asks for whatever He needs. Do you imitate Him in this? Are you somehow

less dependent on the Father than Jesus the Son is? The less you pray, the less you believe you need God's help. The more you pray, the more powerfully you are admitting your neediness and dependence — and the more you can expect to receive, too.

Jesus doesn't just sit back, relax, and wait for the Father to hand Him the nations on a silver tray. He has to actively solicit them, to ask God for them. If the Beloved Son has to ask, do you think you will have to ask too? I rather think so. Don't expect Him to just hand you the fulfillment of all His promises without you doing or saying anything. He likes to be asked.

4. The Son, Heir of the World, v. 8

But when the Son asks, He is granted His request. When someone tells you "ask me, and I'll give to you," you can have pretty good assurance that they aren't kidding. They are definitely going to give you what they're telling you to request.

What does the Father tell Him to request? The nations — the same nations that are raging against Him. These nations belong to the Father (not to Satan), and He is ready and willing to hand them over to His Son as Mediatorial King. The Son inherits everything. God promised to Abraham that he would be heir of the world — a promise that was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. When Christ inherits the earth, then in Him it will belong to Abraham, to you, to me, and to all of Abraham's descendants who have been adopted as the seed of Jesus.

Since we will inherit the earth, we should not trash and destroy it; we should love it and look forward to enjoying it forever alongside Jesus. Since we will inherit the earth, we should be grateful for it and joyful on it. God most High, possessor of Heaven and Earth, has already promised it to His Son.

5. The Son, Possessor of Heaven and Earth, v. 8

And thus, we should glorify Christ as the greatest of all rulers, the King of Kings, the possessor of Heaven and Earth. Melchizedek was His priest, Abraham swore by Him, and we too should bow before Him and worship Him. Everything that is is Christ's.

6. The Son, Breaker of Nations, v. 9

And with that, we finally arrive at the punishment of the rebellious nations. They will be struck down, smashed, by the Omnipotent Son. The promise is first that the nations will be Christ's, and only secondly that they will meet with the consequences of their rotten attitude toward Him. The promise is that if the nations continue to rebel, they will be smashed, beaten, ruined by a rod of iron. That warning is for every nation on earth, the ones that exist today, the ones that no longer exist, and the ones that have yet to come into being. The Son of God owns you all and will break you all if you refuse to submit to Him.

III. The Psalmist's Warning to Kings & Judges, vv. 10-12

The psalmist wraps it up with an application specifically for kings and judges. We don't have any kings or judges in our midst today. Nonetheless, we should learn from these applications in two ways. First, we are kings and priests to God. The warning to kings does apply to us. Second, we have political responsibility. We are required to use what power we do have to encourage our kings and judges to obey these applications. I don't think we are called to abstain from politics

altogether unless we can find candidates who definitely obey these five injunctions. But again, as much as lies in you, you need to bend your kings and judges this way.

A. Be Wise

Kings need to be wise. That means walking in the fear of God — something the psalmist is about to enjoin on God’s people in the next verse.

Are you wise? Do you have the wisdom that comes from cultivating a healthy respect and awe for the Almighty?

B. Be Instructed

The second thing that the Psalm requires is prudence. This word is translated here by various English versions as “be instructed,” “be warned,” “show discernment,” “learn your lesson,” and “submit to correction.” That’s a lot of different nuances to find in a single usage, which means that the word is very broad in its meaning. The overall point is clear enough, though: By listening to the psalm, you as a king can and should learn something about the character of Christ and how to treat Him with the utmost respect and honor. If you come away from this psalm without a renewed resolve to submit unreservedly to Jesus the Son of God, you have not heard what the psalm said. It said that Jesus is going to reign, and that there is nothing the nations can do to prevent that. And then it challenged you to respond rightly to that news.

C. Serve Yahweh with Joyful Fear

The next application is to serve Yahweh with joyful fear. Obey with fear; rejoice with trembling. The psalm is capturing the twin truths that we love God with everything we have, and fear Him from the depths of our souls. He is awesome and terrifying, more overwhelming and powerful and holy than we can imagine. He is also the soul of joy, the happiest being in the world and the one who gives us dribbles and drops and buckets full of His own joy.

It’s easy to be too dour, and easy to be too flippant. But to have this real joy that is accompanied by a holy fear is hard. Strive to find it. Jesus’ delight is in the fear of the LORD; yours and mine should be too.

D. Kiss the Son of God

As a king, you need to kiss the Son. That means show Him your loyalty and honor. Worship Him. If you don’t worship and obey Him, He will get very angry.

E. Beware of His Sudden Anger

Beware of that anger, for it is quickly kindled.

I think we believe too easily that God would never get angry, and that Jesus certainly wouldn’t get angry. Scripture says differently. Christ was angry while He was on earth; He denounced the scribes and Pharisees in a way that could only be described as angry. And if you kiss Him and then betray Him, a la Judas Iscariot, He will be angry quickly. If you join the rebellious nations, you will find out how quickly His wrath is kindled.

IV. The Blessing that Comes from Taking Refuge in Christ!, v. 12c

But the last word of the psalm is not a warning, or even a direct application, but a reminder that blessing comes from taking refuge in Christ. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him! In other words, the only place that can hide you from the Almighty’s anger is the shadow of the Son of

God. His wrath is quickly kindled, but at the same time, He alone can save you from the wrath of God. He can — and He will, if you come to take refuge in Him.

How do you do that? Through prayer. Ask Him to give you refuge. Flee to Him in Zion. Come to church and hear the word of God. When you do, you will be blessed. Amen.