

WHY DO THE HEATHEN NATIONS RAGE?

Psalm 2: 1-12 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Why do the heathen rage against God? It is a futile exercise with no good end. Of thirty Roman emperors, governors of provinces and other Romans in high office who distinguished themselves by their zeal and bitterness in opposing and persecuting the early Christians, their deaths are remarkable. One became speedily mentally deranged after acts of atrocious cruelty to Christians. One was slain by his own son. One went blind, as his eyes began to fall out of his head. One was drowned. One was strangled to death. One died in miserable enemy captivity. One fell dead in a manner that is unrepeatable. One died of a loathsome disease as several of his doctors were executed because they could not abide the stench that filled his room. Two emperors committed suicide. Another attempted suicide, but had to have help to finish the job. Five were assassinated by their own people and servants. Five others died miserable excruciating deaths, with awful complications to terrible diseases. Eight were killed in battles after being taken prisoners. Among these 30 was Julian the Apostate. In the days of his posterity, he pointed his dagger to heaven, defying the Son of God whom he commonly called the Galilean. When he was mortally wounded in battle, he saw that all was over for him. He began gathering up his clotted blood and he threw it into the air, shouting, “Thou hast conquered, O thou Galilean. Beloved, never once be found fighting God. Human rebellion against God is a natural action and reaction for sinful creatures, but it is nonetheless foolish.

This amazing psalm is about that Galilean, Jesus, Messiah, and about the ultimate victory of the Lord’s anointed. This is clearly a Messianic psalm.. When we preach on poetry, there are two major observations to start with. **The most basic feature of Hebrew poetry is couplet composition. This feature is more commonly called parallelism because two or more parts of a psalm are in some way parallel to each other.** Each verse consists of *A* and then *B* (and occasionally *C*, and even *D*). In order to understand it, each verse requires the reader to identify how *B* relates to *A*. **A second feature of Hebrew poetry is the strophe.** What’s that? Think of it this way: A strophe is to poetry what a paragraph is to prose. A strophe is a distinct block within poetic material. It’s clear that the biblical poets thought and composed in strophes. However, the Hebrew text of the Psalms contains no markers for strophes. So it’s up to us to locate and identify them. What is the point of doing that? It reveals the major sections, the basic structure, and the progression of a psalm. Psalm 2 has four stanzas or strophes. *The first*

stanza or strophe describes the bitter opposition of the enemies of the Lord's Anointed to Him and to those traveling on the blessed way in Psalm 1. The second stanza of strophe describes the calm assurance of the Lord Himself in the face of this bitter opposition. The third stanza or strophe presents the glorious divine ordinance or decree appointed for the Lord's Anointed as to Who He is. The fourth stanza or strophe consists of an exhortation to the rebels of God to submit trembling to the Lord, to kiss the Son and take refuge in Him.

As we look at this Psalm, I want us to think clearly about our noisy world. Our world is filled with voices, and our world grows noisier by the hour. Many voices are vying for our attention. Billions of people are taking instructions from the wrong voices. God help us as individuals and as a church to have spiritual discernment in the face of this noisy propaganda filled world. Three of these voices we need to listen to. One of these voices we must strive never to identify with. Let us then listen to the four voices. God, please help us listen.

LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF DEFIANCE, THE VOICE OF THE HEATHEN NATIONS. (I.) Listen to these defiant voices in verses 1-3. "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.'" Amazingly, the heathen today as always defy and decry and deny Almighty God. **Yet God has provided for basic needs of the heathen.** Acts 14: 17 declares, "Yet God did not leave Himself without witness, for He did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." **God has directed and guided the nations, providing them with rich enjoyment.** I Timothy 6: 17 states, "As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy." **God has determined the history of all the nations hoping they would turn to Him.** Acts 17: 26-28 declares, "And God made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place and habitations, that they should seek God in the hope that they might feel their way toward Him and find Him. Yet He is actually not far from each one of us, for, 'In Him we live and move and have our being.'" So why do the nations rage? What is the answer to the question of the psalmist? And by the way, who is the Psalmist in

Psalm 2? Sometimes the Scriptures are the best and final arbiter of questions for us. Turn to Acts 4: 23-31. Listen to Peter and John after they were released from prison. Let me read this to us. This passage makes me say, “Wow!” The heathen have always raged against the Lord and against His Christ, His Messiah, Jesus, The Anointed One.

So why do the nations rage? Why do they take counsel against the Lord Jesus Christ? The heathen seek freedom without God. P. T. Forsythe once said, “The purpose of life is not to find your freedom. The purpose of life is to find your Master.” Authority then demands submission. The call of the Master is ignored by the nations and by most of the heathen, but still the Savior calls out, Matthew 11: 28-30, “Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest to your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” What has happened to the heathen nations that have defied, decried, and denied God? The nations individually and corporately have turned the world into a moral mess, an intellectual labyrinth, a social nightmare, a political travesty, an economic disaster, and an ecological luge headed for Armageddon. We as men and women are made in God’s image. Since we are each of us made in God’s image, rebelling against God for us all has become in the end, a rebellion against our very own souls, against our spirits, and against our own bodies. Charles Spurgeon once said, “This rebellion of the heathen against God is the hatred of human nature against Him. You see, like Satan, fallen humanity is in constant rebellion against the Lord. Not only are people in rebellion against the rule of God in their lives. Also, even rulers and kings are fighting against God.”

Did you know the defiance is so intense and settled in many sinners’ minds, that amazingly sinners rebel against God by making alliances with others of the same mindset to fight against God and His kingdom. Notice the kings and the rulers of the world have one common enemy—that enemy is the Lord and His Anointed Christ. Mankind who hate God the Father also hates God the Son and Holy Spirit. Mankind wants out from under the Lord’s control. The masses of humanity around the world are seeking to overthrow God. Organized nations seek to dethrone God and as at Calvary, the desire is to destroy Him. Like a raging sea in a storm, the waves relentlessly beat against the shore, one wave after another. In as many ways as the ocean has waves, man attempts to be his own god. Yet, as Peter declared, the relentless raging of the sea of humanity against God is all His plan—including the

providential plan of God for Jesus to be crucified. It was all to do whatever God's hand and His plan had predestined to occur. Though God in His sovereign will planned for Calvary, man acted according to his own rebellious will to destroy Jesus, and all mankind including us—we are all held responsible for the death of Christ at Calvary. There is a second voice.

LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF DERISION, THE VOICE OF GOD THE FATHER. (II.) In spite of the tumult of rage on the earth, there is calm and tranquility in heaven. Turn to Psalm 2: 4-6, the second strophe. We read, “He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then He will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in His fury, saying, “As for Me, I have set My King on Zion, My holy hill.” Why is God laughing? Never once is His kingdom in trouble. God's kingdom is secure. God has established His own King. As the nations rebel, we must not worry. The coming King is already enthroned in heaven. The laughter of God is not a frequent flyer in the Scriptures, but listen to God laughing. His voice is first of all laughing at the world's rebellion. Beloved, we too can smile and even laugh when we know the world's rage is against the One who is our King. So as the world tries to drown out the truth, as the defiant cursing and mocking words are uttered, it helps us know why the world has become so corrupt. It is because the world has defied God the Father, the Almighty. Beloved, who are we listening to. Are we part of the defiant voices that scream against God or are we, with God the Father, laughing at the very idea of anyone attacking our King--King Jesus, our Messiah?

This is an interesting view of God when He speaks. What posture does God have in verse 4? He doesn't even stand to get a closer look. He stays seated. God isn't nervous as we can get. He isn't wringing His hands and at His wits end wondering what to do. No, no, no! He sits in the heavens and laughs. It makes me think of the people who cry out in their pigmy pride saying, “I am God.” God laughs. God's Davidic King, King Jesus is set on His throne on Zion's hill, v. 6. Do you know how God terrifies the wicked in His fury and speaks to them in His wrath? I don't know all the ways, but I know that God's birth pangs of our coming King—are the present day earthquakes, the tsunamis, the hurricanes, the fires, the falling of stars and meteors—the famines, the pestilences, the wars, the rumors of wars—all of it sends chills into the hearts of those who don't know or want to know God.

In Spain two monumental pillars are raised on which is written this inscription, “I, Diocletian Jovian Maximian Herculeus Caesares Augusti, for

having extended the Roman Empire in the east and the west, and for having extinguished the name of Christians, who brought the Republic to ruin.” Do you think God cares that one man set up two little toothpick pillars weighing a few tons to say he has wiped out God’s followers of Christ? Hardly! Charles Spurgeon once said, “No grave can be found for Christianity because the living need no tombs.” All plots against God are in vain, dangerous as they seem. There is an extreme danger however for any of us who set up ourselves on the opposing side of God. There is a severe danger in living our lives as if there were no God. God always has the last word. He will win. Notice Psalm 2- for the last three voices after the raging defiant voices of the heathen, the last three voices are the voices of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thirdly, let’s examine the third voice.

LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF DECLARATION, THE VOICE OF GOD THE SON. (III.) I owe my first sense of direction in preaching this psalm to Warren Wiersbe in just a few notes on a couple pages. I give praise to God for footprints that we all can walk in as we study and teach and preach the Word. Warren Wiersbe wrote, “God decrees that Jesus Christ is His Son. Jesus is God, and He is King by nature, by conquest, and by His resurrection. He is reigning today and we can reign in life through Him.” Paul wrote in Romans 5: 17, “For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.” Jesus is actually the One speaking in this third strophe through David the psalmist, His ambassador, for Jesus is David’s greater Son. I read in strophe # 3, “I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to Me, ‘You are My Son; Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will make the nations your heritage, or I will give you the heathen as Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.’”

These words were first given to David, but the words are Messianic—God the Father gave the Son, His King authority to ask for the heathen you and me as His inheritance. Today, I can tell you the old hymn is right that says, “I can hear my Savior calling.” He called you and He called me. Listen to the voice of declaration—that says, Come to Me. Be My Bride. I stand at your door and knock. I know you have raged with the heathen but I claim you as My possession. Come to Me.” That same voice that gently calls to us to come be His bride, that same voice of the Word of His mouth will soon break the nations with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s

vessel. Revelation 19: 13-16 speaks of the coming of our Lord Jesus saying, “He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is the Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.” Fourthly and lastly,

LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF DECISION, THE VOICE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. (IV.) All Scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit, but these words are truly the counsel of the Holy Spirit. Listen! v. 10-12 “Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. 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.” The Spirit of God is the One who calls for a decision. Listen! Be wise, be warned, Serve the Lord with fear, rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son. Take refuge in the Son and be blessed. It’s decision time.

First, **(1) Be wise.** The Holy Spirit is calling us to be teachable to learn from Him. Are we willing to be instructed? David had no desire to see men suffer. He is God’s spokesman to call by the Spirit not first for the destruction of God’s foes, but for their conversion. All believers must be God’s witnesses to call the raging heathen to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. David is calling out first to kings and rulers. David knew even as Dads can come to Jesus and bring their whole family, so can kings be God’s means to bring villages, cities, countries and nations to bow down to Jesus. **(2) Be warned.** In short, the Spirit is saying the same thing as in Hebrews 3 and 4, “Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts. **(3) Serve the Lord with fear.** This reverence in serving the Lord Jesus is not the life of one in charge of our own life. No, we need Jesus, and we give Him full control. Do we? Or are we arguing with God’s voice, His prompting Holy Spirit? **(4) Rejoice with trembling.** Isn’t that powerful? This is joy that trembles with reverence to the Son of God, the Father’s Anointed King. This is radiant joy with a tear of praise in our eyes but a smile that glows. **(5) Kiss the Son.** Don’t trifle with Jesus. Kiss the hem of His garment, kiss the King’s hand, --both of these practices showed a ruler he had the loyalty of the one kissing him. As the bride of Christ, I love this expression, “Kiss the Son.” To me it is kissing His Word, His voice, kissing His soon arrival in the clouds. **(6) Take refuge in the Son--be blessed.** Esher—O the happiness!