

THE FOLLY OF MAN (1)

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: Psalm 2.

This Psalm covers a lot of ground and is clearly Messianic, having clear reference to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The nations of v1 are the people who are without God. In those days it was all the neighbouring nations of Israel. They were heathen lands which expressed enmity towards the people of God and the God of Israel. Although they were actual people, we realize that the battle runs deeper and that we are wrestling with spiritual powers. These are kingdoms that at war, as we hear described in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:14-15). It is the devil who is ultimately at war with God and His people.

In this Psalm we can see the contrast between the plans of man and the plans of God. There are the kings of earth (v2) and the one enthroned in the heavens. His King is already installed in office (v6). There is the contrast between their rage (v1) and the Lord who laughs at them and holds them in derision (v4). It is a lesson on man's folly as viewed from heaven. We see the folly of human ambition compared to the plans of the Lord as they centre in His Son. The world actually belongs to Him (v8) and so the Psalm ends with a warning to those rulers to make their peace with the true king (vv10-12).

1. The present situation

The pandemic has well and truly lost its central position in the public consciousness. The headlines are now about Ukraine, the casualties, the numbers of refugees, and the uncertainty of what all this means in the long term.

Certainly, the pulpit is not a privileged position to try to give an opinion on matters that are far from clear. Most of us are not experts on Russian culture or politics, nor on the shape of the West's policy position towards Eastern Europe in the post Berlin Wall age. The task is not made easier by the fact that truth is the first casualty of war, and it is hard to know the truth of all the claims that are made, or assess their importance or relevance. We are also not likely to have much influence directly on the direction of policy since we have neither the ear of Putin or Western leaders.

That we can and should pray is self-evident. We pray to the God of v4. (See Psalm 46:8-11). It is also right that we should seek to help the plight of refugees. We are not required to pass a moral judgment to influence policy or any such thing, but we might

like, for our own peace of mind, to have come to some kind of judgment. We may all differ in what judgment we come to. We cannot be definitive in these judgments. The Lord knows the times that are set for the nations (Acts 1: 7-8). He determines the boundaries of the nations (Acts 17:26-27) to the end that people might seek Him.

We certainly can accept that no party in the conflict is blameless. Nobody is 100% right. But when that is said, it would require an exceptional reason to warrant and justify such destruction of cities and lives. No adequate moral ground would be able to supply a justification for the action that is being taken against the people of Ukraine. What ever mistakes and faults can be found in Ukraine, the EU or NATO, they do not justify the action the Russian forces have taken.

Neither should we really take credibly Putin's effort to portray himself as saviour of Christian values in the West. Though we do look at Western culture at the decay and loss of moral purpose or resolve that has characterised past decades.

2. An important question.

Who is asking the question in verse 1? It is not the psalmist. It is not us. It is God. He does not ask because He is perplexed, or out of His depth or frustrated. He is asking the nations themselves a pointed question and inviting us, as those who belong to His kingdom, to wonder at the world of men. Their efforts are so futile and so doomed to fail ultimately. We are invited to think through this for ourselves, to study the nations and the emptiness of what they are pursuing.

The nations are the sum of all men's hearts. They are raging (psalm 46:6). They are plotting and conspiring (Psalm 48:1-6; Psalm 83: 1-8). This is the restlessness of the fallen human heart (James 4:1-4). It is warring and fighting to get what it wants but for no good purpose.

This is the folly of man that we are invited to marvel at. The world is so engrossed in its fruitless pursuits. But the perspective we have is the one that the Lord invites us to share.