

Exalting Christ the Sovereign Son Over the Nations (Ps 2)

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The psalm asks ‘*why do the nations rage?*’ And it’s the question raging this week that CNN can’t answer. Why is there such Islamic rage in the nations of our world, including people who live in or come to our nation whose rage motivates to mass murder? Last week after church we heard that Omar Mateen from a family of another nation, pledging allegiance Sunday to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, unleashed his rage in the worst mass shooting in the history of this nation, and the natural question is why. The question of Ps 2 couldn’t be more timely: ‘*Why do the nations rage?*’ In context, that’s not talking about faraway countries, it’s any raging heathen in any land. In international news for years we’ve seen the nations rage, but it’s now closer to home, a radical Islamic shooting a few hours from here a few months ago in San Bernadino CA leaving 14 dead, and now an Orlando shooting left 50 dead at the hands of a man married in CA only 1.5 hours from here. Why?

Omar himself spoke to the why of his rage on his Facebook post during the shooting: ‘You kill innocent women and children by doing us airstrikes..now taste the Islamic state vengeance...America stop bombing the Islamic state..I pledge my alliance to [ISIS leader] abu bakr al Baghdadi..may Allah accept me.’¹ His posts identified himself as with ‘real Muslims [who] will never accept the filthy ways of the west’ and his last post warned ‘In the next few days you will see attacks from the Islamic state in the usa.’² He reportedly called 911 and news agencies to make clear he was doing this for the Islamic state. There’s a lot of anger in our country, even between parties, a lot of anxiety, a lot of apprehension ... how should we act or react?

We can start with the biblical commands to weep with those who weep and mourn with those who mourn, that includes a Muslim family losing a loved one, and those who lost a son or daughter whose moral lifestyle we reject as sinful. From the beginning of the Bible we’re told any murder of human life is not just a crime against humanity, it’s against God who makes man in His own image (Gen 9:6, and the NT applies that to how we speak about fellow human beings as fellow image-bearers, James 3:9). Other communities are the mission field, whether immoral or Islamic, and hate in our heart is also serious to God and can send us to hell as well according to Jesus (Mt 5:22). Only looking at the news in focus of scripture helps us understand the root of such rage and the remedy in the gospel, and the response we should have. Ps 2 begins with the why question of those who rage in our world and plan in vain to take over the world (as the Islamic State actually thinks they will). Then it moves from the *why* to the *Who* – the true God - then *what* God’s Son is promised about the future of nations, then the *how* - how we respond. The 4 parts: man’s rebellion, God’s reaction, Christ’s reign, your response.

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https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/investigation-into-orlando-shooting-continues-no-impending-charges-expected/2016/06/15/c3eccf5e-3333-11e6-8758-d58e76e11b12_story.html

2

<http://www.foxnews.com/us/2016/06/15/orlando-terrorists-chilling-facebook-posts-from-inside-club-revealed.html>

1. Man's Rebellion (v. 1-3) - the *why* question

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'

The NT tells us King David wrote these words. He wrote other words about the terror he faced, the heathen trying to kill him and his people, the nations like the Philistines who took their stand against the Lord and defied Him, as Goliath famously did. The peoples of Israel in some cases plotted the death of David and his people, his own son would form a mutiny wanting to cast off the bonds of the rule of the chosen king, as he wanted the throne instead. This is written in the present tense but the NT applies its truths to the future.

David is the original 'anointed' of the Lord, but this isn't just David writing about the geopolitical climate of his day and people opposing him and his kingdom. Notice in v. 2 at the end of the verse, it's Anointed with a capital A in the major modern translations. This has been interpreted as a messianic psalm, a psalm about Messiah, 'Anointed' is the Hebrew word *Messiah*. The ancient Jews understood Psalm 2 ultimately looked forward to the promised Anointed One, the Son of David prophesied in 2 Samuel 7, the greater King than Solomon. Some scholars think Ps 2 was sung by Israel in crowning the future kings of Israel, if so, it was only a wish that this was the One, but Jesus alone fully fulfills this passage.

Keep a finger here and turn to Acts 4 and I want us to see before we look at the rest of this psalm how inspired scripture interprets and applies Ps 2. In Acts 4, the early church was being persecuted, the apostles were in jail in v. 3, but the gospel could not be chained: ²⁴ *And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them,* ²⁵ *who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, "Why did the Gentiles [nations] rage, and the peoples plot in vain? ²⁶ *The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed'—**

- that's Ps 2, and it says David spoke it but the Spirit also spoke in it
- *Anointed* in Hebrew is *Messiah*, but in Greek translation it's *Christ*
- NASB and NKJV have '*against the Lord and against His Christ*'
- so the Spirit-inspired commentary on Ps 2 shows it's about Christ
- this also shows us the early Christians prayed the words of Ps 2 to a '*Sovereign Lord*' (v. 24). How did they interpret and apply Ps 2?

²⁷ *for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.*

The same sovereign hand and plan at work with their anointed king David in the past was at work in a greater way in God's providence predestining the death of the ultimate

Anointed King Jesus at the hands of heathen men. Knowing His sovereignty over evil in v. 29 gave them boldness, courage.

How is the church to interpret Ps 2:1-2? The Spirit-inspired interpretation by the NT church shows us: don't just think raging nations in OT, think of the Idumean Herod, and the Italian Pontius Pilate, and the Roman soldiers. When Ps 2 talks about the peoples plotting a vain thing, end of v. 27 applies that to the peoples of Israel plotting in vain to stop the sovereign Lord Jesus. So you can go back to Ps 2 but I just wanted you to see this is for the church

Martyn Lloyd-Jones was born in Wales in 1899. Someone who's attended here got to hear him preach in person in London. I never did as I was only 4 years old when he preached his last sermon, but I've heard a recording of it. He was in his 80's when he preached the last time in Wales and Glasgow, it was a message on Ps 2. That greatest expository preacher of his generation in the UK saw this text as the greatest and most timely message to bring for his farewell to his beloved, and he talked about how relevant its verses were to what was going on in Europe and the world in his life (think of WWI and nations raging in WWII, the axis of evil conspiring a vain thing to take over the world, think of Nazism, communism raging against Christ, think of the cold war at that time before the Berlin Wall came down). It was powerful to listen to that blast from the past, and Ps 2 just as speaks powerfully today.

The end of v. 1 also asks why the peoples plot in vain? We can think of the political vanity in our own government, the planning, pushing vain agendas. v. 2 says the world's leaders literally *'take their stand...'* (i.e., defiant stance) and the nation's *'rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his Anointed'* (capital A, remember when that's quoted in Greek, it's Christ). That's been going on since Christ came and the Jewish council gathered the Gentile rulers against the Lord's Christ, it's been going on since the church's persecution in Acts 4, mankind is rebelling against God and His Son Jesus. One translation of v. 3 has *'They say "Let's tear off the shackles they've put on us! Let's free ourselves from their ropes! ...that hold us back ...that tie us down,"'* another version says *'Let us...free ourselves from their restraints.'*³

That's not just true of other nations trying to tear down crosses and get rid of all symbols of Christianity, to try to replace Judeo-Christian law with theirs. The moral revolution in our own nation attempts the same politically. Can't we also hear in Ps 2 the American voices of the past several decades saying 'let's cast away God from secular schools or society, keep the state separate, let's not be fettered by cords of Christian tradition, let's not be tied down by the ropes of religion, no, let's tear down any ten commandments references or anything offending atheists, let's tear off any shackles left that once kept people from divorcing, let's free ourselves sexually, let's burst through any bands or bounds of morality, let's cast away clothing and common sense of decency, let's throw off all moral restraint and break through every barrier!'

³ NET, NCV, HCSB.

Can we hear voices in our nation raging in just the last year, ‘let’s get rid of marriage as society has known it for thousands of years as being between a man and a woman, let’s throw off any idea of man and woman or that father and mother are good for boys or girls (and let’s not call them boys or girls if they don’t want us to). Let’s not be held back or tied down to our biological gender or bodily design or the bigotry that thinks there should be bounds for men around women or young girls, let’s throw open all doors but throw out all wisdom, and above all let’s throw away all vestige of Christ, His Word.’ How are we to react to the world around us? Ps 2 shows us how God reacts, and we need to see our sovereign God is not anxious or alarmed in the least.

We’ve seen **1. Man’s Rebellion** (v. 1-3), we move from the *why* to the *Who*, **2. God’s Reaction**

v. 4: *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.”*

Spurgeon said: ‘God Anointed is appointed, and shall not be disappointed.’⁴ Notice the contrast: earthly kings stand against God, but God sits in heaven. God is unthreatened, undisturbed, on His throne, but man is off his rocker! Man sets himself against Jesus but God Himself set Jesus as Zion’s King in the heavenly Zion till the day of fury when He comes to His earthly throne. Based on how the NT quotes Ps 2 I take as His heavenly enthronement,⁵ but Jesus will return to earthly Jerusalem and reign eternally in New Jerusalem.

We sang earlier: Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion, city of our God;
He whose word cannot be broken formed thee for His own abode:
On the Rock of Ages founded, what can shake thy sure repose?
With salvation’s walls surrounded, Thou mayst smile at all Thy foes.⁶

Conrad Mbewe calls this ‘the laughable madness of humanity’s mutiny.’⁷ The world is on a warpath against God, but God isn’t pacing nervously, He sits and He snorts in derision at man’s decisions, as if to say ‘really? *You* seriously think *you* can get rid of *Me*?!’ This little rebellion isn’t even taken seriously by the God of heaven. No panicking in heaven, just laughing. The whole world tries to make a plan against God, seeking counsel together for a coupe, but God needs no counsel or planning session. He laughs it off as a pathetic puny microscopic idiotic insignificant insurrection. What happens here on earth doesn’t make the Lord troubled, it makes the Lord chuckle.

Acts 4 applies this to when Christ was crucified, the people of the earth had conspired to put an end to Christ, and they thought they had that weekend. Christ had said ‘*take my yoke upon you,*’ but in killing Him they thought the yoke had now been cast off, that Christ and His movement was now finally over officially permanently. But God in heaven sat and smiled and laughed! Heaven rumbled, the earth shook, the grave opened,

⁴ Charles Spurgeon, *Treasury of David* (Hendrickson), vol. 1, p. 11.

⁵ REFS?

⁶ John Newton, “Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken.”

⁷ Sermons on Psalm 2 preached in Zambia at www.sermonaudio.com

and the King came out! In the words, of v. 1 all their raging and plotting was in vain to stop God's:

Vainly they watched...vainly they sealed the dead [Jesus in the grave]...
Death cannot keep his prey, Jesus my Savior, He tore the bars away, Jesus my Lord!
Up from the grave He arose! With a mighty triumph over His foes!⁸

Ps 2:3 says the enemies of Christ try to tear His bars away from them, and in Christ's death they thought they had Christ bound with that sealed tomb, but He actually tore away the bars of death and burst the bonds of the grave! In Acts 7, the same counsel thinks if they kill Stephen that will end Christ's church, but God smiled again as He looked at Saul of Tarsus holding their robes, and God got the last laugh as Saul spread the church much farther. In history, many rulers attempted Ps 2:3, but they all failed and Jesus prevailed:

'Of 30 Roman emperors, governors of provinces, and others high in office, who distinguished themselves by...persecuting the early Christians, one became speedily deranged after some atrocious cruelty, one was slain by his own son, one became blind, the eyes of one started out of his head, one was drowned, one was strangled, one died in a miserable captivity, one fell dead in a manner that will not bear recital, one died of so loathsome a disease that several of his physicians were put to death because they could not abide the stench that filled his room, two committed suicide, a third attempted it, but had to call for help to finish the work, five...assassinated by their own people or servants, five others died the most miserable and excruciating deaths, several of them having an untold complication of diseases, and eight were killed in battle, or after being taken prisoners. Among these was Julian the apostate. In the days of his prosperity he is said to have pointed his dagger to heaven defying [Jesus], whom he commonly called the Galilean. But when he was wounded in battle, he saw that all was over with him, and he gathered up his clotted blood, and threw it into the air, exclaiming, "Thou hast conquered, O thou Galilean."...a medal was struck by Diocletian [Roman emperor who lived 245-313 AD and thought he had accomplished v. 3, his medal that exists to this day boasts]... "The name of Christians [is] extinguished."...in Spain, two monumental pillars were raised, on which were written: Diocletian ...having extinguished the name of Christians...everywhere abolished the superstition of Christ...But in this *'the people imagined a vain thing;'* ...Christianity was on the eve of its final and permanent triumph...'⁹

'Diocletian set up pillars declaring victory over Christ, but 7 years later...Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire.'¹⁰ Later in history, Lawson writes: 'in A.D. 360, [Roman emperor] Julianus ... sought to remove Christianity from the face of the earth...In an attempt to entertain some friends, Julian taunted one believer named Agaton. With so many Christians being put to the death, the emperor asked him, "How is your carpenter of Nazareth? Is he finding work these days?" Without hesitation Agaton replied, "He is perhaps taking time away from building mansions for the faithful to build a coffin for your Empire..." [many centuries later] In...the French Revolution, a political

⁸ Robert Lowry, "Christ Arose."

⁹ Spurgeon, p. 16.

¹⁰ James Johnston, *The Psalms: Rejoice the Lord is King*, vol. 1, p. 39.

revolutionary stormed the Bastille in Paris...scaled the Cathedral of Notre Dame and tore down the cross from atop its spire, dashing it into pieces on the ground below ...the revolter boasted, “We are going to pull down all that reminds you of God!” But from the crowd came the challenging reply, “you might as well pull down the stars themselves!” Such is impossible, and so are the arrogant attempts of sinful man to overthrow the sovereign rule...’¹¹

Ps 59:8 ‘*you, O LORD, laugh at them; you hold all the nations in derision.*’ I couldn’t find the quote, but I remember hearing of someone in China who boasted in the earlier 20th century that Christianity had been banished from China, but God laughed again, and made its greatest growth in history there. Nations in the Middle East have raged more than ever in history the past 25 years, Islamic rage wants to wipe out Christianity and take over the world. God laughs: in the Middle East more Muslims ‘have come to Christ in the last 25 years than came to Christ in the previous 1400 years...of Islam...’¹²

Behind the frowning providence of persecution God hides His smiling face. Ps 115 says ‘*Why should the nations say, “Where, now, is their God?” But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases*’ (v. 2-3 NASB). In OT times we see God’s sense of humor when Pharaoh wants to wipe out the Israelite male generation, but his own daughter raises one who delivers all Israel after mocking Egypt’s gods with plagues. Pharaoh tried to drown the little ones but last laugh: Pharaoh’s big army drowns in the red sea instead.

Ps 37:12 ‘*The wicked plots against...and gnashes his teeth at him, but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he sees that his day is coming. The wicked draw the sword...their sword shall enter their own heart...*’ It’s like Haman building gallows to hang all the Jews, but it becomes his own noose instead. Prov 1 says to those mock God’s wisdom ‘*I will laugh...I will mock...they shall eat the fruit of their own way...*’ (1:22, 26, 31). In other words, to men who mock God: God is not mocked, you will reap what you sow (Gal 6:7). If you mock God and don’t repent, one day He will mock you before His wrath strikes you.

Sin is no joke but He can’t help a sovereign smile at man’s stupid rebellion. Maybe you saw your kids do something so foolish and ridiculous, you can’t help but laugh initially, but then at some point you have to speak to them to deal with it. God isn’t amused by sin, but when His tiny creatures shake the fist at God, it’s so ridiculous, it’s humorous. Think of a tiny ant on the edge of this pulpit, if I could hear it talk, and it says ‘I’m sick of you, I’m casting you off, I’m taking you and the church down.’ All I can do is laugh as all it takes is my little finger to take it out. Or think of a little yippee dog barking at the moon thinking that will make it go away. All the dogs in the world forming a united nations of dogs can rage all they can, but it has zero effect on the moon. Or picture a 6-year-old with a squirt gun showing up on the shores of North Korea, and asking his armies ‘where’s Kim Jong-Un, you need to end the nuclear weapon program, break up the army and surrender!’

The sovereign Lord ... nobody can stop His reign

¹¹ Steve Lawson, *Psalms 1-72*, p. 21

¹² Johnston, p. 39.

So why do the nations rage and all the peoples plot in vain.
 Their sin and offense is against His excellence and they're not ashamed...
 They cock and aim. Their target: His cosmic reign.
 That's like a kid with a super-soaker trying to conquer Spain!
 Man ...trying to ball up his puny fist At the Lord who is ruling this,
 what's amusing is God just laughs like "who is this?!"
 Stupid kids who persist in foolishness, it's only by God's power you exist!
 Now you declare war on the Lord when before you were born
 He formed you in the uterus?!
 Look: our God is in the heavens and He does all that He pleases
 He's established His King in Zion and His name is Jesus

That takes us from God's Reaction (v. 4-6) to Christ's Reign (v. 7-9)

Jesus speaks in v. 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."*

The language of decree in v. 7 takes us back to eternity past, a decree from God the Father to God the Son who's eternally begotten, with no beginning. He's the *only begotten* Son, that means *unique One and Only* Son of God. When Jesus was baptized, 'a voice came from heaven, "*You are my son...*" (Lk 3:22 NIV), but the fulfillment of v. 7 is after Jesus rose:

- Acts 13:33 'this he has fulfilled to us ... by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, "*You are my Son, today I have begotten you.*'
- Rom 1:4 says He was 'declared to be the Son of God...by his resurrection'
- Heb 1:3-5 'After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...as much superior to angels...For to which of the angels did God ever say, "*You are my Son, today I have begotten you*"?'

Ps 2:7 is the resurrected ascended exalted enthroned Jesus, the King of v. 6 over the raging nations, and He will be given the nations as His inheritance. Those who hate Him will be His heritage and those who plot against will be His possession. The heathen think they can win their own way, but the Lord shows 'no, I own you.' They think they can bring the end of Christianity on earth, but God promises His Son the ends of the earth will bow to Him from ISIS to Iceland, from Al Qaeda to America, from North Korea to Nigeria.

'Ask of Me, and I will give the nations,' the Father says, and the Son asks of Him in Jn 17:20-24, not just for disciples of the nation of Israel, but for all God gives, that raging nations will become praising nations, every tribe and tongue. I've heard it said this verse promising nations to Christ was one of the verses that fueled the early missions movement in recent centuries, as Christ's people joined Christ's prayer asking for the nations to be given for His possession as they took the gospel to 'the end of the earth' as v. 8 said.

v. 9 reminds us from His heavenly throne He will come again, as Rev 19:15 says at the 2nd coming, 'to strike down *the nations, he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God...*' In Revelation we see the final attempt of

Ps 2's multi-national united defiance in Rev 11: *The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants ... the seventh angel blew his trumpet [the last trumpet, 2nd coming], and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever."* (v. 18, 15)

What's Your Response (v. 10-12)? [Response #1. Be Wise and Be Warned](#)

¹⁰ *Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth.*

O Abu bakr al Baghadi, be warned! O King Abdulla II, be wise! O Ayatolla Khamenei, take warning! O Sultan Said, O Prime Minister Sheikh Al-sabah, O President Mahmoud Abbas, Ps 2:10 is for you! O Kim Jong-un, wise up! O General Secretary of the Communist Part of China, O Emperor Akihito, watch yourself! O Putin, O PM Cameron, O Queen Elizabeth, O Castro, be watchful! O Barack, O Hilary, O Donald, show discernment! O Congress, O Senate, O democrats, O republicans, O independenta, watch yourself if you think you can tear out the pages of God's law on gender and marriage. The end of v. 10 in the NASB is '*judges of the earth, take warning.*' O Supreme Court judges trying to cast off God's law like in v. 3, Jesus is warning you. v. 9 says Christ's iron rod can smash you at any moment like fragile pottery

[Response #2: Be Repentant and Be Reverent](#)

He will rule the nations with a rod of iron, but He offers a scepter of grace in v. 11: *Serve the LORD with fear...* [that can also be translated 'worship']. This is a call to drop your weapons and drop to the ground in worship, fall in fear. It's a call to unconditional surrender, to submit as a lowly servant in awe as you serve. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom in v. 10. Some teachers will tell you fearing the Lord has nothing to do with fear, but notice the end of v. 11 mentions *trembling*. There is reverence and rejoicing in this verse but there's also a real element here of fear and trembling. There is such a thing as a sanctifying scare, a holy hush, a trembling with trusting.

[Response #3: Embrace Christ and Exalt Christ](#)

The end of v. 11 commands '*...rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled.*' Christ isn't all love, He has anger and wrath that can flare up if you reject His love. Why is the King angry and why does His wrath make sinners perish? Sin is missing the mark, but it's not like we're trying for a bullseye and almost hit it, but just fell a little short, and hey, nobody's perfect so what's the big deal with sin that makes us deserve death? But Greg Gilbert helps us see sin is as if we turn the bow and arrow and aim at God.

We want to take God out or at least take Him out of the picture like v. 3 says, we don't want Him to rule or set the rules. Sin is rebellion and treason against the King, trying to take His throne, that's why it's so serious, and any King must bring rebels to justice. But instead of the death we deserve, there's mercy for all who kiss the Son. Run to the Lord in faith, fall at His feet with trembling, kiss His nail-pierced feet. Give homage to the King who knows you like the back of His hand. If He shows you the back of His hand, kiss the nail-prints. Show honor to Him who wrote your name on His hands and on His heart. Show affection to the Kinsman-Redeemer as the bride whose banner over you is

love if you love Him. If you don't yet love Him, embrace Him by faith before it's too late! If you turn from your sin, trust in Him: *Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*

Take refuge in Christ by embracing and clinging to Him, like a man almost falling off a high-rise building because of a foolish mistake, but he grabbed hold of a cross beam, clung to it with all his might, and as he was rescued it seemed too good to be true. He rejoices with trembling, fearful but thankful. Blessed, happy, are all who take refuge, who trust, who totally cling in faith to Christ. Don't be those in v. 3 futilely foolish trying to cast off His cords, join in the worship of those who cast down crowns at His feet.

Embrace the Lord and exalt the Lord of Ps 2, the Sovereign Son over the nations. Don't be dismayed by the raging nations and problems in our nation, because God isn't. Don't lose hope or lose faith based on who may sit in the Oval Office, put your hope and faith in the One who sits in the throne room of heaven.