

Psalm 2
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God actually used your church in a significant way in my life, shaping the direction that I took. As PD said, right now, I'm a pastor at Chapelgate, and I lead Metro Baltimore Seminary where we're training the next generation of leaders to bring the gospel to those who don't know Jesus in our region. But prior to that, I was a missionary in London, England. We worked to start a church among goths and punks and anarchists. And my passion to see those who don't know Jesus be connected with God and His love was partially fueled here at Columbia Presbyterian.

I was a college student at Towson University. And I was beginning to hear of all that God was doing in the church around the world. And somebody told me about this class you all were hosting, "Perspectives on the World Christian Movement." This was like 25 years ago. But every Monday night for an entire semester, I would drive 30 minutes back and forth here. And during that class, we studied how Christianity had traveled all over the globe throughout history. We studied practically how to bring the gospel to places that had never heard of Jesus before. I even did a project on the Uighurs peoples, which is very different from the alternative cultures in London. They're actually a Muslim group in northwest China and are actually in the news right now because they've been facing oppression. But God used that time in that class here at this church to begin to show me that the movement of His grace is never just about the individual. It's never just about what He wants to do to bless you. It's about how He wants to bless you so that He can bless others through you.

And that movement of God's grace, that missional nature of God's grace is touched on in the passage we're going to look at this morning. It speaks to the turmoil that we face in the world around us, and it invites us to find a place of refuge and to become that place of refuge for others. This morning, we're looking at Psalm 2. And I would invite you now to listen to God's word from Psalm 2.

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."

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."

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, 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."

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. [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray.

Father, thank you that you haven't left us to wander around in the darkness on our own, but you have moved toward us. You have reached out to us. You have spoken your word to us. You have come in

the person of Jesus, and you've given us your Spirit. So we ask you, Holy Spirit, to open our ears that we can hear from you this morning to make our hearts soft, that we would receive your message and put it into practice. Father, whatever is in me that would keep us from hearing from you, I pray that you would just put that aside and speak to us this morning in your words. In Jesus's name. Amen.

So the Book of Psalms is one of my favorite books to preach out of, and so I was very excited when I heard that that's the book that you all have been studying this summer. I think one of the reasons that I love it so much is that it presents us with a God who is present in all aspects of life. In many ways, the book has functioned as a hymn book for the life of God's people, as it should. It's filled with rich teaching about who God is and about who we are before Him as we respond to His greatness with worship. But more than that, it covers the full range of human emotion and experience as it gives us a glimpse that whatever you might be feeling, whatever you're going through today, God is present, and you can meet Him. Whatever your life is like, whether life has been great lately or whether you're one of those that PD noticed that needed a bit of coffee on your way in this morning. God is here, and He invites you to experience refuge this morning.

Now Psalm 2, along with Psalm 1, functions as a kind of introduction to the whole book of the Psalms. And what I want to do before I get into the actual passage of Psalm 2 is I want to give us two kind of points of introduction to hold on to that will really kind of be themes that we come back to throughout our time together this morning. The first one is this. As part of the introduction to the psalms, Psalm 2 moves from where Psalm 1 begins with, "Blessed is the man," and Psalm 2 expands that blessing out and ends with, "Blessed are all who take refuge in him." So even in these first two chapters of the psalms, we see God's grace that begins with the individual, but it doesn't stop there. It moves out to blessing the nations. Psalm 1 begins, "Blessed is the man," and it moves to the many by the end of Psalm 2, "Blessed are all who take refuge in him."

And that expansion of blessing for all really controls not only the book of—appears over and over again in the psalms, but it actually is sort of the theme of all of scripture as we see God promising to bless Abraham, and through him to bless all nations. But it's not just the blanket blessing that's just God sort of—it's just blessing out there. It's a very specific blessing that has a very specific source. "Blessed are all who take refuge in him." The "him" that that's talking about at the end of Psalm 2 is God's Son. That's the point of this psalm, that God's blessing flows through His Son to those who take refuge in Him. So we're going to keep coming back to that image of taking refuge in the Son and receiving God's blessing as we work our way through the psalm this morning. That's the first piece of sort of introductory themes.

And the second one is this. Psalm 2 is part of a group of psalms that are called the royal psalms because they're written about the king. This one in particular may have been written to celebrate the coronation, the crowning of the king in Jerusalem or it may have been used as the annual celebration of the king's rule. And it refers to God's promise to David that He would have a father-son relationship with him, that as the king, David would be God's special son who would then bless the people through him. And when David died, the hope of God's promises to David remained for each king that came after him. And even when there were no more kings in Jerusalem because the enemies of Israel had come and carted them off into exile, still there was this hope, this expectation that one day, God would send a king who would bring all of His promises to fulfillment.

And as the New Testament writers read this particular psalm, Psalm 2, they saw in it a description of Jesus and all that He had done. I don't know if you've ever read a posting for a job description or, you know, an award or something, and every point, you're like, "Oh yeah. I know exactly the person that this is describing."

This happened to me when I was in high school. I went to high school at Chapelgate Christian

Academy just down the road. And my senior year, during our senior awards ceremony, they were giving out this award called The Prize, and it was for character in athletics. And as they read the description, at every point, I was like, "Yeah, that's me. That's me." They hadn't announced who got it yet, but you know, they had gotten to the end of the description. I was like—I was halfway out of my seat. I was ready to go up there and get it. And of course they said the person's name, and it wasn't me. And so I had to sit back down. Because, you know, the problem is we can't see ourselves clearly all the time, right?

But the New Testament writers, when they read this psalm, they said, "That's Jesus. That's Jesus. That's Jesus." And they were right. It was Him. It was Jesus who fulfills the hope of this psalm for the ideal king, and Jesus is the focal point of God's blessing. Blessing comes through taking refuge in Him.

And so those two themes—that Jesus is the focal point of God's blessing to us and that that blessing is then extended out. It's never meant just for us. Those are going to be the two themes that we keep coming back to as we work our way through each section of this psalm.

So let's dive in here. The first three verses of Psalm 2 describe a sort of international conspiracy. "Why did the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves against the Lord and his Anointed." There's turmoil. There's trouble brewing. Some translations say, "Why did the nations conspire? The kings of the earth rise up." They don't like the fact that God is in charge, and they are not. They want to throw off the rule of God to get rid of His restraints on their power and do whatever they please.

Now the truth is this isn't just the kings of the earth. This is every single human who has ever lived since the time of Adam and Eve. The heart of sin is a prideful arrogance that says, "I want to be in charge. God, I don't like that you're God. I want to be you." And so we live our lives complaining about those in power and authority over us, don't we? How many times do we complain about the decisions our parents make because they don't understand us? How many times do we talk to coworkers about this ridiculous decision that the boss has made? How many times do we complain about our teachers, about those in authority over us? We want to be independent. I mean, we just celebrated Independence Day last weekend, right? That's sort of at the heart of who we are as a country. And I'm not saying freedom's—freedom is a good thing, but the human heart twists it because we want to be God.

Now, all of those individual feelings of wanting to be powerful and in control, they get expanded on this international scale, and the nations of the earth, their kings don't want to answer to God. And, again, this wasn't happening just in the time of, you know, king David. This has been the story of human history forever right up until today. The nations want to throw off God's rule, and they refuse to submit to His king. And there's this boiling rage inside at being made to serve.

And so in this context, what does it mean to take refuge in God's Son? What does it mean to take refuge in Jesus? Again, that's where this psalm is heading. "Blessed are all who take refuge in him." Well, I think on a global scale, on kind of a big national scale, there's plenty for us to be afraid of right now. There's plenty of turmoil in our world right now. There's economic uncertainty, lingering stuff with the pandemic. Even just this week in Haiti, the president was assassinated. There's trouble in Afghanistan as the U.S. pulls its army out. But the psalms offer us a glimpse of hope beyond the chaos that we see in our world.

Verse 1 asks the question why. Why do the nations rage? Why do the peoples plot in vain? To take refuge in the Son is to trust that God is in control and that His control is good, that His plan is not contingent on a better king coming along, a better political leader. It's not contingent on getting the right group, the right leader in power, or whatever the case may be that we think might make our world safer or our country more prosperous. Because remember the New Testament looks and says Jesus is the

Lord's anointed. Jesus was God become human. He came to confront and shut down all attempts to rule the world for selfish ambition or evil purposes so that whatever schemes might be hatched by whoever is in charge, whether they're good or not, they will not stand against God's purposes. Jesus said that even the gates of hell could not stand against His plan to build His church. And so we can take refuge in Him and let go of our need to get wound up about world events or to rage if our preferred person is not in charge because Jesus is in charge. He is on the throne.

And the same raging in the nations exists in our own hearts as well, and so more personally, to take refuge in Jesus is to lay down my passion for getting my own way. It's to admit that I want to run the world and to acknowledge that if I did, it would not go well for me or anyone around me. You know, we get angry because sometimes we do everything we're supposed to do, and things don't turn out the way we thought they would. Right? We follow all the rules, and life didn't turn out the way we wanted. Sometimes we get angry because we make a choice, and we don't like the consequences of that choice. So we look for somebody to blame. Other times we get upset because the thing we thought we wanted turns out not to really satisfy us. To take refuge in Jesus is to acknowledge that those feelings of anger and resentment come from a deep place of wanting to be in control, of needing to be right, and demanding that my desires be met, and to let go of all of that because Jesus is the one who is in control. And that is all that matters.

Jesus even died for my anger and resentment about not being in control. So I can admit it. I can acknowledge what's going on inside and put it on Jesus and receive God's forgiveness. And here's where that outward movement begins to set in. When I take refuge in Jesus in this way, I actually begin to be a place of blessing and refuge for others because I'm free to extend forgiveness when they disappoint me.

In the next section, we shift our focus in verse 4 from the nations and onto God, who is in control. Verse 4 says, "He who sits in the heavens laughs." God is pictured as mocking or scoffing at the nations. It's not that God is looking down and, you know, telling jokes or making fun of the situation. I mean, verses 5 and 6 make it clear that He takes rebellion very seriously. But He's so far above them, He isn't really bothered by it. You know, it's like an older brother, you know, sort of holding his younger sibling at arm's length while they're trying to rage at him. He knows. God knows He is so far above that any attempts to knock His plans off course will fail. God's plans are sure, and He isn't worried at the leaf.

And when we forget that, then we get sucked into the battles being fought in our culture thinking that it's our job to defend God. It's our job to make sure that He isn't dishonored, to make sure that His agenda gets put forward, you know, whether it's in our courts or in our schools or in our government. But God doesn't need us to defend Him from the assaults of an unbelieving world. Taking refuge in Him means we are free to enter into the brokenness of our culture around us. But we don't need to fight God's battles for Him.

Now, that doesn't mean that God isn't paying attention, or He isn't going to act against the evil that's brewing in the world. Verse 5 says, "He speaks to them in his wrath and terrifies them in his fury." Now, if we forget where this is moving to Jesus, it would be easy to think, "Okay, now here it comes. God's bringing the thunder. He's going to destroy everybody that doesn't agree with me," right? Because that's where we all go, right? But remember we read this through the lens of Jesus.

What does verse 6 say? It says, "I have set my king on Zion." And if we read this just as a song about installing the new king in Jerusalem, we might come to the conclusion that God was installing a king who, you know, was going to bring the big guns and destroy the nations. That's what the people in Jerusalem thought was happening when Jesus was riding in on Palm Sunday. They shouted, "Hosanna to the son of David!" They thought, "The king is finally coming. Save us, son of David." That's what "hosanna" means. "Save us, son of David." They thought He was the king that was coming. And He was,

but not the way they thought.

In the New Testament Book of Hebrews in chapter 2, verse 10, it talks about this installation of Jesus as the king, and it describes this same scene that Psalm 2 envisions. But it says that Jesus was crowned king and given glory and honor not through power, but through the things which he suffered. It was Jesus's sufferings that brought about the defeat of His enemies. Because, ultimately, Jesus didn't come to bring the wrath of God on you and I, though we deserve it. He came to take God's wrath on Himself. God pours out all of His anger on Jesus on the cross because of all of the rebellion that you and I committed, because of all of that resentment that we don't get to be God. Jesus took all of that on Himself.

And so to take refuge in Him is to run to Jesus when we are in the wrong. Apart from Him, there is only God's wrath, only God's judgment. But in Jesus, there is only the delight of the Father for you. There's not a little bit of anger and a little bit of delight. There is only God's delight for you as His son, as His daughter. That is what it means to find refuge in Jesus. You can admit that you don't have it all together, that you are in the wrong. It is safe to bring your failures into the light because in Jesus, all of it is washed away. He is the king who came to take punishment, not to give it out. And when you take refuge in Jesus like that, you begin to, again, be a place of refuge because you become a safe place for others to admit that they don't have it all together and that they also are looking for a place where they can be loved and accepted and free of judgment.

The third section of this psalm begins with verse 7. Here the writer switches voices actually, and now the one speaking is actually the Lord's anointed king, presumably king David. And he quotes God's promise from 2 Samuel 7, "Today, you have become my son. You are my son. Today, I have begotten you." God had a special relationship with His king, and that was the source of the king's strength and power. It wasn't that the king was weak. He was strong. But if you get the order reversed, you miss the power. Jesus didn't come as one who had no power at all. He came as the one who laid His power aside. The king isn't loved by God because He's powerful. God didn't look and say, "Who is the most powerful human right now? And I'm going to make him my son." God said, "You are my son." And that is the source of your strength. That is the source of your power. It is the relationship with God that is the source of the power.

Verse 8 speaks of His kingdom spreading throughout the world. That's that global spread of God's blessing. "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage." So God doesn't say, "You're my son, and we're going to go off and have father-son bonding time. And we're just going to forget everything around us." No. He says, "You're my son. Ask of me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance." That relationship is meant to be a blessing for the world.

Verse 9 compares his strength to iron because he is strong in that relationship to God. Now here's the cool thing. Jesus has very similar words spoken over Him at His baptism. The Holy Spirit appears as a dove and descends on Him, and a voice from heaven says, "You are my son, whom I love. With you I am well pleased." Jesus lived out of that relationship with His Father. He never claimed power or glory for Himself, but He always pointed back to the Father.

To take refuge in Jesus means to let Him bring you into that relationship with God, to welcome you as a son, as a daughter of God. To hear those words spoken over you, "You are my beloved. I am pleased with you." Why? Because you're strong? Because you're beautiful? No. Because I love you. And because I love you, you are strong. You are beautiful. You are powerful because I love you.

Are you tired of trying to control the chaos of your life? Take refuge in Jesus. Admit that you can't control the mess of your own life. Are you tired of trying to curate the perfect life on social media, trying to put that image up there that you think other people want to see? Take refuge in Jesus. He sees the real

you. He knows you, and He loves you. Bring your brokenness, your pain. Bring it to Him.

You know, when we see death take a loved one from us, when we feel the loss of a broken relationship, when we experience disappointment, we're confronted with the truth that we're weak, that we have no power to bring back the dead, to change someone else's heart, to make the world go according to our plans. Taking refuge in Jesus means we become children of the living God. He is the one who is strong even when we're weak.

The final section, beginning in verse 10, the focus returns back to the kings of the earth. Presumably, they're still conspiring against the Lord and His anointed. That's what humans do. And they're warned. They're encouraged to fear the Lord and kiss the Son. Fear involves more than just being scared. It's about admitting that God is the center, and I am not. It implies dependence. And kissing the Son means showing respect. In other words, my life isn't about me. It's about you. It's admitting who I really am and who God is. God is greater, and I am dependent on Him.

The original context of king David in Jerusalem, taking refuge in Him would've meant a lesser king coming to Him and submitting to His rule and saying, "Whatever strength I have is yours. Whatever my people need, it's from you. I am dependent on you as the greater king." And with the coming of Jesus, that type of dependent loyalty is transformed and extended beyond the boundaries of one particular country. All who come to Jesus—it doesn't matter where you're from or what you've done. All who come to Jesus, believing that He is God who rose from the dead, come under His refuge. Their life is tied to Him.

You know, when we celebrate the sacrament of baptism, that water that we put on the person being baptized symbolizes that they are washed in Jesus, that they are bound up in His life, that His death was their death, and His life is their life. That is our identity. The only identity we have is in Jesus. To take refuge in Jesus is to be free to admit who we truly are because we know that nothing—nothing you all could ever find out about me defines me because my life is in Jesus. That's true if you've found refuge in Him.

So when we own who we are, it is a scary thing. It means seeing things about yourself that you'd probably like to hide. It means admitting that, you know, when you hear that checklist of all those things, you think, "Yeah, that's me," you can't see yourself. It means letting other people speak into your life and help you see who you really are. You know, sometimes I'm afraid to admit who I really am. Sometimes I think I need to be a certain kind of leader, and so I try to be somebody I'm not. I avoid situations that I'm not sure I know the answer to because I don't want people to know I don't know what's going on. Almost always, that makes it worse and not better. Trying to be someone you're not will always end in hurt and loss.

So come to Jesus for refuge. Admit that He is God, and you are not. Let Him show you who you really are. There is safety there, safety to be weak, to be broken, to be yourself. And in doing that, you expand the circle of blessing beyond yourself. Because the refuge God invites you to is for more than just you. It's for those around you who also suspect that life is too much for them, who are maybe consumed by anger or disappointment or the frustration of broken dreams, who are hurting and just need someone to listen to them without judgment. You can be the conduit of God's blessing to them as you take refuge in Jesus because you become a safe place for others to find refuge in Him, too. You know yourself as you are, and they see that. And the circle of blessing expands from "Blessed is the man," to "Blessed are all who take refuge in him."

So I don't know what's going on in your life today. I don't know what you brought with you here. I don't know what you're going to when you leave this place. Maybe things are going great. Maybe you're barely holding on. But either way, you have a place of refuge to go to. It is the Lord Jesus who died for

you, who is risen for you, and who calls you, "My son, my daughter." Come to Him. Take refuge in Him. "Blessed are all who take refuge in Him." Amen.

Father, thank you for your promise that all who come to you, you will never cast out. Thank you that we have a place of safety where we can know ourselves as we truly are and be known and loved by you. Would you meet each of us in the place where we need it this week? That we would find refuge in the risen Jesus. We pray in His name. Amen.