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IS THE WORLD OUT OF CONTROL?

Psalm 2

by

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Lesson 3: Psalms

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Poet Robert Browning wrote, "God's in his heaven--all's right with the world." Where in the world was he? As we look at reality, we have to question Browning. God is in heaven, but all is not right with the world!

Since the beginning of time, the world has known strife. The history of man is essentially the history of war. One of the earliest of all historical records, a Sumerian bas-relief from Babylon (ca. 3000 B.C.), shows soldiers fighting in close order, wearing helmets and carrying shields (James Boice, *The Last and Future World* [Zondervan], p. 98). There have been almost non-stop wars ever since.

In our century, World War I was supposed to be the war to end all wars. About 20 million people were killed. Soon after the world was locked into World War II, which claimed 60 million lives. The December 25, 1967, *U. S. News & World Report* wrote, "Since World War II [there have been] at least 12 limited wars in the world, 39 political assassinations, 48 personal revolts, 74 rebellions for independence, 162 social revolutions, either political, economical, racial, or religious" (the figures and quote are from Boice, p. 99).

Obviously these figures would have to be revised upward significantly in the 25+ years since then. We've seen war between Russia and Afghanistan, China and Vietnam, Vietnam and Cambodia, Iraq and Iran, Iraq and Kuwait, and the current war in Bosnia. There have been and still are numerous regional conflicts and violence: Northern Ireland, South Africa, Lebanon, Israel, Azerbaijan, India, Panama, Peru, Colombia, etc. Our own country faces continued racial tensions, a rising crime rate, gang wars, random violence, and increasing moral degeneracy. Instead of agreeing with Browning that "all is right with the world," we would probably be more inclined to side with the guy who wrote

this limerick:

God's plan made a hopeful beginning,
But man spoiled his chances by sinning,
We trust that the story
Will end in God's glory,
But at present the other side's winning. (Boice, pp. 124-125.)

We may chuckle at the limerick, but deep down inside we know that the present world scene is no laughing matter. Man is not "in every day and in every way getting better and better."

Is the world out of control? How should we view the present world chaos? A wife said to her husband, "Shall we watch the six o'clock news and get indigestion or wait for the eleven o'clock news and have insomnia?" (in Reader's Digest [4/86], p. 2). Should we sink into depression and despair? Should we ignore the world and its news, ostrich-style? Psalm 2 gives us an answer. In it, the author, King David (see Acts 4:25), views the rebellion of the nations against God. He looks at the chaos of the world scene in his day and says that

Though the nations have rebelled against God, He is sovereign; thus, we must submit to Him while there is time.

Even though the world scene looks as if God has been on an extended vacation, David shows us that God's plans have not failed and shall not fail. Everything is under His sovereign control and He will ultimately triumph in His ordained time. Thus David appeals to the rebellious nations to bow before the Almighty God while they still have time.

Structure and background of the Psalm:

Psalm 2 is the most frequently quoted psalm in the New Testament. It fits together in an interesting way with Psalm 1 to introduce the Book of Psalms. Psalm 1 begins with, "How blessed"; Psalm 2 ends with the same word (in Hebrew). Psalm 1 ends with a threat; Psalm 2 begins with a threat. In Psalm 1, the godly man meditates on God's law; in Psalm 2, the wicked

meditates (NASB = "devising," NIV = "plot"; same Hebrew word) on how to cast off the rule of God. In Psalm 1 the theme is the contrast between the righteous and the wicked person; in Psalm 2 the theme is the contrast between the rebellion of wicked rulers and nations and the rule of God's righteous Messiah. Psalm 1 consists of two stanzas and six verses. Psalm 2 is twice as long, consisting of four stanzas and 12 verses.

The Psalm is structured as a dramatic presentation in four acts. In Act One (2:1-3), David raises the question about the chaos in the world, and the kings and rulers come forth in a chorus to say their lines (2:3). In Act Two (2:4-6), God calmly sits upon His throne in heaven and speaks His line against the rulers (2:6). In Act Three (2:7-9), God's Anointed One speaks and reveals God's decree or predetermined plan for dealing with man's rebellion. In Act Four (2:10-12), the psalmist speaks out again, giving a closing appeal in light of the previous acts.

For purposes of grasping the message of the psalm, Acts Two and Three may be grouped together so that the psalmist is saying three things: 1. The nations have rebelled against God (2:1-3). But, 2. God is sovereign and has a predetermined plan to judge man's rebellion (2:4-9). Thus, 3. We must submit to Him while there is time (2:10-12). Let's examine these three thoughts:

1. The nations have rebelled against God (2:1-3).

To understand this psalm, we must realize that on one level it applies to King David. The schemes of these rulers against the Lord and His anointed are rooted in a time in David's reign when some of his vassal nations sought to rebel (such as 2 Samuel 10, when the Ammonites and Syrians rebelled). David, the Lord's anointed king over His people, Israel, writes this song to show the folly of rebellion against God's anointed king because of the promises God had made to that king. Thus, on one level, 2:1-3 refers to those rebel kings and their attempts to shake off David's rule over them.

But it is also obvious that the psalm goes far beyond David's experience. It is ultimately fulfilled only in God's Anointed

(Hebrew, "Messiah"), God's Son who is also David's son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, David wrote this psalm not only about himself, but in a deeper and much more complete way, about Messiah Jesus. Thus just as these kings rebelled against King David, so all men have rebelled against King Jesus. The Bible teaches that:

A. Satan is the author of this rebellion.

Isaiah 14:12-14 describes the rebellion of Satan in heaven against God. When he fell, he led a portion of the angels with him. Under his authority, these demons now wage war against God and the righteous angels. The world was created as the theater for this great conflict to take place. Man was created in the image of God and placed on earth to reflect God's image and rule as His representatives over His creation. But the Scriptures also teach that ...

B. All people have followed Satan in his rebellion against God.

When Adam and Eve succumbed to Satan's temptation and disobeyed God, the human race fell into sin and thus came under God's judgment. This rebellion took on an organized form at the tower of Babel, when proud men came together and proposed to build a tower into heaven to make a name for themselves (Gen. 11:4). The Lord confused their languages and scattered them, which was the beginning of the nations. The pride of those at Babel, who sought to make a name for themselves, was diluted by being divided among the various nations of the earth. But Satan works through the pride of world rulers to weaken the nations through conflict and keep them from submitting to God (Isa. 14:12). As biblical prophecy shows, in the end times, the nations will come together under a single world ruler in defiance of the Lord and His Anointed. Satan is the main force behind this world ruler, the antichrist.

But even in His curse upon the serpent, God pointed to the way of redemption that He had planned for fallen man: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He [the woman's seed] shall bruise you [the serpent] on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel" (Gen. 3:15). Messiah Jesus, born of a woman, would be bruised on the heel by Satan in death as the sin-bearer for the fallen race, but He would bruise Satan upon the head in His triumphant victory over sin and death in His resurrection from the grave. By bringing people from every nation under the lordship of God's Anointed, Jesus, the rebellion of Satan is thwarted.

Thus in His eternal decree, the Father invites the Son, "Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession" (Ps. 2:8). Either through their willing submission to the message of the gospel now or through their forced subjection under the rod of the Messiah when He comes to judge the nations, their rebellion will be quelled.

Meanwhile, where is God in all this rebellion? Did He go to sleep? Has He lost control? No, the psalmist goes on to show that even though the nations have rebelled against God ...

2. God is sovereign (2:4-9).

God doesn't even get up from His throne to deal with the vain schemes of rebellious kings: "He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them" (2:4). This doesn't mean that God gets a kick out of man's rebellion or its devastating results. "'As I live!' declares the Lord God, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live'" (Ezek. 33:11). Rather, God's laughter shows the folly of rebelling against Him. It shows us that ...

- A. God has a calm assurance in the face of man's rebellion (2:4-6).

Mighty men rise up and proudly think that they're so great and powerful. God laughs: "You've got to be kidding!" Who is puny man to try to stand against the Sovereign God? "He removes kings and establishes kings" (Dan. 2:21) according to His will. The mighty Nebuchadnezzar, the greatest ruler on the earth in his day, grew proud and attributed his greatness to himself. God humbled him with a strange disease, so that he lived in the fields and ate grass like a beast, until he learned that "the Most High is the ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whomever He wishes" (Dan. 4:25).

Napoleon Bonaparte, when intoxicated with success at the height of his power, is reported to have said, "I make circumstances." God laughs: "Oh, really?" God let him go on for a while, and then He spoke to him in His anger and terrified him in His fury (Ps. 2:5), and Napoleon came to nothing.

Did you know that God is not worried about man's rebellion against Him? He isn't sitting on the edge of heaven, biting His nails, and saying, "Oh, what am I going to do?" He lets man go on for a while in his rebellion, but then His anger and judgment will come, and man's proud plans will come to nothing. The psalmist thus goes on to show that ...

- B. God has a predetermined plan to deal with man's rebellion (2:7-9).

This plan centers on the person and the power of God's Messiah, His Anointed one.

**The person of Messiah (2:7):* Verse seven obviously goes beyond David to Christ. The verse is quoted several times in the New Testament with reference to Jesus

(Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5). It plunges us into some deep theological waters that we can never fathom. We can never fully understand the Trinity and the nature of the relationship between the members of the godhead. If we could, God would not be God. We can only go as far as the Scriptures reveal, and no farther.

While probably somewhat anthropomorphic (using human terms to describe God) so that we can understand it to some degree, the relationship between the First and Second Persons of the Trinity is expressed as that of Father and Son. This does not imply any inequality, or that there was a point in time in which Jesus was begotten of the Father (in which case He would not be eternal). The scriptures teach, and orthodox theologians for centuries have agreed, that Jesus is eternally the unique Son of God, second person of the Trinity.

The Athanasian Creed puts it: "The Son is from the Father alone; neither made, nor created, but begotten ... generated from eternity from the substance of the Father." The Nicene Creed expresses it: "The only begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Lights, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father" (quoted in Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* [Dallas Seminary Press], I:316).

When Psalm 2:7 says, "You are My Son, today I have begotten You," there are two possible interpretations. Either it refers to the day of the eternal decree, when Christ was declared to be the Son of God and begotten (John Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord* [Moody Press], p. 41). Since the decree is eternal, Christ's Sonship is eternal. Or, "this day" refers to the time when Christ's identity was manifested, when the Father bore witness to Christ as being His own Son, which was primarily through the resurrection (Rom. 1:4; this is Calvin's view, *Calvin's Commentaries* [Associated Publishers & Authors],

2:129-130). But both views hold that Christ is eternally the Son of God.

God's predetermined plan for dealing with man's rebellion involves the Second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, whom God sent into the world to pay the penalty for man's rebellion (John 3:16; Gal. 4:4). He died according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God at the hands of godless men (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). But God raised Him from the dead and He ascended to heaven, where He is now waiting to return with power. That's the second part of God's plan:

**The power of Messiah (2:8-9):* Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, will return bodily to this earth in power and glory to crush all opposition and to reign in righteousness from David's throne. John describes his vision of the Lord Jesus in that great day in Revelation 19:15-16: "And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the winepress of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, 'KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.'" At the end of Christ's 1,000 year reign, Satan and all who followed him will be thrown into the lake of fire where they will be tormented forever and ever (Rev. 20:10-15).

That is God's plan for dealing with rebellious man and with Satan and His forces. His plan involves the Second Person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God, who is going to return to this earth in power to put down all rebellion and to rule in righteousness. How should we respond to this fact?

3. We must submit to God and His Anointed while there is time (2:10-12).

It is not just the proud kings of David's day who have rebelled against the Lord and His Anointed. "All have sinned

and fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). We have all, in our own way, said toward God, "Let us tear His fetters apart, and cast away His cords from us" (Ps. 2:3). We've all said, "I'll do it my way!"

At first glance, you would have thought that everyone would welcome God's Messiah, who came to save us from our sins. But the issue isn't just salvation. Jesus didn't come to save us so that we could get a free ticket to heaven and then go our own way. The issue is one of lordship. The Lord's Anointed is the King who will reign, if not by our willing submission now, then by forced submission when He comes again. He does not take second place to anyone. Every knee shall bow!

Thus the exhortation of 2:10-12 applies to each person: All people must show discernment and take warning. All people should bow in submission and fear before God and give the kiss of obeisance to His Son. The picture is that of bowing and expressing submission before a monarch so as not to incur his displeasure. We must submit to Christ as Savior and Lord before He returns in judgment, so that we do not "perish in the way."

The urgency of submitting to Christ is expressed by the phrase, "His wrath may soon be kindled" (2:12). The signs of our times point to the soon coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The first time He came in mercy, to save. The second time He comes in wrath, to judge. The end time events predicted in the Bible are all lining up, just as predicted. But even if His coming is delayed, you have no guarantee that you will have another day on this earth. If you do not submit to Jesus Christ before you die, you will face the wrath of His judgment (Heb. 9:27)! As Matthew Henry put it, "Those that will not bow shall break."

Conclusion

You can't find peace and safety anywhere in the world, but only in Christ. A few years ago, a retired couple, alarmed by the threat of nuclear war, studied all the inhabited places on earth, looking for

the place where they could most likely escape the threat of war. They studied and traveled and traveled and studied. Finally they found the perfect place: a small, obscure island off the coast of South America. They moved to the Falkland Islands just before Britain invaded to reclaim that territory from Argentina!

World chaos and war will only increase as His coming draws near. If we can't escape it, what can we do? The last line of the Psalm is God's gracious invitation: "How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!" Don't run from God; run to Him! Derek Kidner aptly says, "And there is no refuge from Him: only in him" (*Psalms* [IVP], 1:53). As we see the chaos in the world, we can be truly happy and blessed by taking refuge in our God. The early church took refuge in Him by praying Psalm 2 as they faced persecution (Acts 4:23-35). In our troubled times, when it looks as if the enemy is winning, we can do the same. Let's join the early church in doing everything we can to make Christ Lord of all the nations! Even if we should die a martyr's death, our sovereign God will ultimately triumph!

A cartoon shows a fearful couple, huddled together in bed as they watch TV. The announcer is saying, "And that's the news. Good night and pleasant dreams!" The only way we can watch the news of this troubled world and have pleasant dreams is if we've taken refuge in our sovereign God, who has even the proud rebellion of wicked men under His control.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Since God is sovereign, why doesn't He just send Christ to crush all rebellion and end all this suffering?
2. Can a person accept Christ as Savior without accepting Him as Lord? Cite biblical support.
3. How would you answer a critic who said, "If God is sovereign over everything, then He is the author of evil"?
4. God's wrath seems like an outmoded concept in our day. How can we get people to take it seriously?

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