

The Safest Place on Earth

Psalm 2

We are taking two weeks to study Psalms 1 and 2 which together form an introduction to the entire “book of Psalms.” We hope this introduction provides a context for your experience with the other 148 Psalms. The themes in Psalm 1 and 2 are found throughout the rest of the psalms.

Last week we saw from Psalm 1 that the person who wants a fruitful and stable life needs to “delight in the law/instruction of the Lord” and “meditate day and night.” This person is teachable and hungry to learn from God. Psalm 1:1 makes the pronouncement that that person is “blessed”: the favor of God rests upon that person. This is the first bookend for the introduction to the Psalms.

Psalm 1:1 - “How blessed is the man. . .”

Psalm 2:12 - “How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!”

The other bookend for the introduction to the Psalms is found in the last verse of Psalm 2. There we find the pronouncement, “Blessed are all who take refuge in Him.” These two bookends are describing the same people: those who delight in the law of the Lord are also the people who “take refuge” in Him; whereas Psalm 1 emphasizes the blessing of fruitfulness and stability, Psalm 2 emphasizes the blessing of God’s protection. You only need to “take refuge” if you’re in trouble, if you face threats that you can’t handle. Just so you know where I’m coming from this morning, it’s my conviction that every one of us faces such threats - internal (anxieties, sinful urges, addictions, destructive thoughts, etc.) and external (people who want to see us fail spiritually and personally, evil spiritual forces, etc.). Therefore, it’s my conviction that every single one of us needs to take refuge in Someone who is powerful and exalted and willing to rescue us.

Psalm 2 contains four stanzas of three verses each. By the time we get to the fourth stanza, it should be obvious why we should take refuge in God.

The Nations rebel against the LORD and His Anointed (*Psalm 1:1-3*) Since YHWH is the Creator of everyone and everything, the entire world is accountable to Him. Therefore every person in every nation should turn from their gods and worship Him. Verse 1 expresses dismay that this is not the case.

1 Why are the nations in an uproar
And the peoples devising a vain thing?

The term translated “devising” (ESV - “plot[ing]”) is the same word used in Psalm 1:2 translated “meditating.” Whereas the righteous meditate on God’s instruction day and night, the nations are meditating about how they can rebel against YHWH. For reasons that will become obvious, their plotting is “vain” or empty; their plans won’t succeed.

2 The kings of the earth take their stand
And the rulers take counsel together
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,
3 “Let us tear their fetters apart
And cast away their cords from us!”

We see a stark contrast between these kings/rulers and the righteous in Psalm 1. Whereas the righteous in Psalm 1 “do not walk in the counsel of the wicked,” these kings/rulers **embody** the counsel of the wicked: they meditate together against the Lord and His Anointed.

When you see the term “LORD” in all caps (in most English translations) it is a reference to YHWH, the God of Israel, the God who created heaven and earth, the Lord of lords.

“His [YHWH’s] Anointed” is the king in Israel. The king was called “His Anointed” because the ceremony for designating Israel’s next king involved “anointing” the person with oil. For example, when Samuel designated David as king, he anointed him with oil (i.e., he poured [olive] oil over his head); from that point forward, the Spirit of the Lord empowered David. In the psalms, “the Lord’s Anointed” was the descendant of David who reigned as king in Israel.

Here in Psalm 2:3, the “kings of rulers” want to escape His authority and **live independent of Him**. They want to break away from any control He might have through His teachings, His people, or His actions. That was true in 1,000 b.c. when David reigned; it was true in the first century when Jesus walked this earth; and it is true today. Generally speaking, powerful people do not want to submit to the Lord and His anointed.

In the first century, the apostles were very clear that Jesus was YHWH’s Anointed:

Anointed = Messiah (Hebrew) = Christ (Greek)

They were equally clear that the Romans and the Jewish authorities were the “kings and rulers” of Psalm 2. In Acts 4 we read:

24 . . .they [the apostles] lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, “O Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them, 25 who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said,
‘Why did the Gentiles rage,
And the peoples devise futile things?
26 ‘The kings of the earth took their stand,
And the rulers were gathered together
Against the Lord and against His Christ.’
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 purpose predestined to occur.

Do you see what they did there? They understood that Herod, Pilate, the Romans, and the Jewish authorities were the “kings and rulers” who plotted and schemed against Jesus who was the Lord’s Anointed/Christ. Crucifying Jesus Christ was the ultimate expression of Psalm 2:1-3. When the Lord’s Anointed took on flesh and blood and walked among them, they crucified Him on a cross.

Of course the nations still rage today against the Lord’s Anointed, Jesus the Christ, and against everyone who follows Him (as Jesus predicted). Here in this country we might experience a bit of rejection or discrimination or ridicule. But in other parts of the world, Christians are being imprisoned, tortured, and killed. Of course people of other faiths are persecuted also. . .but researchers tell us that followers of Christ remain the most persecuted people on earth. In recent years we’ve seen Iraqi Christians given the option of renouncing Christ or being beheaded. They refused to renounce Christ; they experienced the rage of the nations.

What is God’s response to those who plot and rage against Him and His Christ?

The LORD laughs at His enemies and enthrones His King in Zion. (Psalm 2:4-6)
Notice how the Lord’s initial reaction to the rebellion of the nations is to laugh/scoff at them:

4 He who sits in the heavens laughs,
The LORD scoffs at them.

In other words YHWH is not “shaking in His boots”; He is not intimidated. He laughs at them because He knows that their rebellion will one day end (see Psalm 34:12-15).

5 Then He will speak to them in His anger
And terrify them in His fury, saying,
6 “But as for Me, I have installed My King
Upon Zion, My holy mountain.”

This announcement that YHWH had installed His King in Jerusalem was terrifying to the nations that rebelled against Him. From there He would reign over the entire earth. Throughout the psalms we hear statements like “The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice.”

The background to God “installing His King” in Jerusalem is 2 Samuel 7. There we read that after David had built his own palace (royal residence), he wanted to build God a house (a temple). But through the prophet Nathan God told David, “You’re not going to build Me a house. . . I am going to build you a house/kingdom that will never end” (2 Samuel 7:12–17):

12 “When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his

kingdom. 13 “He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

Solomon, David’s son, **would** build a temple for God in Jerusalem. But more significantly, God would “establish the kingdom [of David’s descendant] forever.” This promise sustained the nation of Israel throughout its subsequent history. For example, when the nation was taken into exile and there was no king on the throne, Psalm 2 reassured the Jewish people that a descendant of David would eventually reign again in Jerusalem.

6 “But as for Me, I have installed My King
Upon Zion, My holy mountain.”

Zion was the stronghold that David captured (2 Samuel 5:7) from the Jebusites and the spiritual center of Jerusalem. Zion was the place where the temple was built and therefore the place where God dwelt (Psalm 9:11). YHWH **dwelt with** His King and YHWH **reigned through** His King from Zion.

The third stanza continues to explain how YHWH’s King would reign:

The LORD decrees that His Anointed (His Son) will inherit and rule the nations.
(Psalm 2:7-9) Beginning in verse 7 the Lord’s Anointed is speaking. He explains the decree that the Lord had spoken to Him:

7 “I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD:
He said to Me, ‘You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You.

A couple of things are significant about this “decree” given to God’s “Son.” First, the Lord says that He would have a Father/son relationship with the king He installed on Zion. This Father/son relationship was established in the passage we referenced earlier, 2 Samuel 7 where God promised that David’s descendants would sit on the throne of Israel forever. In 2 Samuel 7:14 God says this of the king in Jerusalem:

14 “I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me. . .”

God would treat the king of Israel like a good father treats his children. This passage goes on to explain that this includes discipline when the king sins; but unlike He did with Saul, God would never remove David’s descendants from the throne. As we’ll discuss shortly, eventually God would install a King on the throne of David that didn’t need to be corrected. Second, notice (in Psalm 2:7) the comment, “Today I have **begotten** You.”

7 “I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD:
He said to Me, ‘You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You.

To our modern ears, “Today I have begotten You,” sounds like, “This is the day I gave birth to you” (with the implication that there was a time when you didn’t exist). That is certainly the usual meaning of “begotten” in the OT: Abraham “begat” (became the father of) Isaac” (Gen. 25:19). But in Scripture being “begotten” didn’t **necessarily** have those associations. Here, for example, God isn’t saying, “Today I am bringing you into existence,” but rather, “Today I am giving you the status of king over Israel. As of today, I am going to rule My people through you.”

This discussion about God “begetting” His Son is relevant for us because several times in the New Testament this verse is quoted in reference to Jesus (e.g., Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5). These quotations don’t imply that Jesus became a Son or was brought into being when God declared, “You are My Son, today I have begotten You.” For example, in Acts 13 Paul quotes Psalm 2:7 as support for the **resurrection** of Jesus (not His birth):

32 “And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, 33 that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that **He raised up Jesus**, as it is also written in the second Psalm,
‘You are My Son;
Today I have begotten You.’

This is consistent with what we’ve seen in Psalm 2. When God raised Jesus from the dead, He declared His unique status as the King who would sit on David’s throne forever (see also Romans 1:4). The NT consistently says that after Jesus was bodily resurrected, He was raised up and seated at the right hand of God (see Hebrews 1:3, Ephesians 1:20-21, Colossians 2:1, etc.). In other words, **Jesus was enthroned as King after His crucifixion and resurrection**. Jesus didn’t become God’s Son at that point; God had already declared, “This is My Son” at His baptism and at the transfiguration. At His ascension God **enthroned** His Son as King.

Just as Jews in the old covenant took great comfort in the assurance that a descendant of David would reign in Jerusalem, we should find great comfort in the assurance that Jesus our Savior and High Priest is enthroned at God’s right hand forever. This is the reason we can take refuge in Him: because He is enthroned at God’s right hand far above every spiritual enemy we face.

Back in Psalm 2:8-9 we read (the rest of the third stanza):

8 ‘Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance,
And the very ends of the earth as Your possession.
9 ‘You shall break them with a rod of iron,
You shall shatter them like earthenware.’ ”

The nations who rage against the Lord and His Anointed (1:1-3) are going to get the exact opposite of what they want: Jesus will inherit the nations and will reign over them. Twice in the book of Revelation (Rev. 12:5, 19:15) verse 9 is referenced in relation to Jesus; even though the nations rage against YHWH, His Christ, and His people, He will ultimately rule them with “a rod of iron.”

The fourth/last stanza presents us with the same options we found in Psalm 1: We can submit to the Lord (and His Son) and find blessing, or we can stay on the “path of the wicked” and “perish.”

Worship the LORD (with joy and trembling) to avoid His wrath. (Psalm 2:10-12) In light of everything that’s been said in Psalm 2, the psalmist pleads with the kings, rulers, and anybody else who’s listening to make sure that they are rightly related to YHWH and His Son, the King.

10 Now therefore, O kings, show discernment;
Take warning, O judges of the earth.
11 Worship the Lord with reverence
And rejoice with trembling.

In light of the fact that “the Lord reigns,” kings and judges should be warned and be discerning enough to humble themselves, repent, and worship Him. “Rejoicing with trembling” is an interesting combination, isn’t it? Throughout Scripture, the joy of the Lord and the fear of the Lord go together (see Philippians 3:12). Verse 12 reiterates:

12 Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way,
For His wrath may soon be kindled. . . .

Instead of “Do homage to the Son,” a more literal translation would be “Kiss the Son.” When you kiss the cheek (or the ring) of a king you are pledging him your loyalty (e.g., 1 Kings 19:18 speaks of “knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him.”). We learned in Psalm 1 that “the way of the wicked will perish” (1:6). Here we learn that the way to get off of “the path of the wicked” is to kiss the Son who has been enthroned as God’s king.

As the book of Revelation explains, one day His wrath will be kindled and it will be too late to repent; until that day, however, we always have the option of turning from our sin and to Christ. This was the basic message Christ preached: Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand; in other words, God is establishing His Kingdom by placing His King on His throne to rule the entire world. One day EVERY KNEE WILL BOW to Jesus - either in glad worship or forced submission. But every knee will bow.

In the last line of verse 12 the implication for the reader (including you and me) is finally made clear:

How blessed are all who take refuge in the Son! (Psalm 2:12c)

12 . . . How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

To “take refuge” means to flee somewhere for safety. We go to the place that we think gives us the best chance of protection and survival. Because God has enthroned His

Son at His right hand, the safest place on earth is “in His Anointed” - the Messiah, the Christ.

The rest of the book of Psalms is largely a prayer book for those who want to learn to take refuge in YHWH and His Son. The psalms rehearse how YHWH has protected and delivered them in the past; they cry out to God to deliver them in their present troubles; and they express confidence that God will deliver them in the future, even beyond the grave (Psalm 16:10-11).

Twenty-five times in the book of Psalms refuge is mentioned. The picture we get of “taking refuge” is that of **actively** trusting in YHWH through faith, through His Word, through prayer, and through relationship with His people.

Again, we all face threats internally and externally, visible and invisible. The question is **where are you taking refuge?** We all take refuge somewhere; the question is where.

- * Some take refuge in other people (see Psalm 118:8-9): “If my _____ would get their act together, then I’d have a good life.”
- * Some take refuge in money and possessions: “If I have just a little more affluence I’ll be content.”
- * Some take refuge in their own understanding: “If I work hard enough I can figure out and solve all my problems.”
- * Some people try to escape their troubles through drugs or alcohol or sensuality.

Why not flee to Jesus for refuge?

Just like the fruitfulness and stability of Psalm 1 doesn’t happen by accident, taking refuge in the Lord and His Christ doesn’t happen by accident. And it usually doesn’t happen without a serious investment of time and spiritual energy. Just as there is nothing more urgent than delighting in the law of the Lord (i.e., being hungry and teachable), nothing is more urgent than taking refuge in the Lord and His Anointed, Jesus Christ. There are too many dangers and threats to take your chances anywhere else.