

Christianity in America in Biblical Perspective

*Where Do We Go from Here?*

“Listening to Four Voices”

Psalm 2

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In this study we'll be looking at Psalm 2 but I want to start by reading from Acts 4. We'll be looking at a quartet of voices from Psalm 2 but first from Acts 4 the Gospel has been proclaimed and is doing a great work Jerusalem. Peter and John have been arrested and then freed. Look what they say to the believers in terms of how you serve the Lord when the kings rise up to intimidate you. Acts 4:23–31 says [23] *When they (Peter and John) were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. [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 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’—*

*[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. [29] And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, [30] while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” [31] And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

It's interesting to note that the Gospel had been preached by Peter and the Apostles after they had been filled with the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room and 3,000 which were just the heads of the households come to Christ and they are baptized. Then people are being saved every day. Now the Gospel goes to 5,000 at one time and then Peter and John end up in jail. When they are in jail they are told from their sovereigns, those in authority, their rulers, Roman and Gentile rulers, ‘do not preach in His Name any longer.’ They get out of jail and declare ‘we must obey God rather than man. While we respect delegated authority but whenever delegated authority supersedes the sovereign authority of God we must obey God rather than man.’ So filled with the Holy Spirit they preached the Word with boldness but Peter, as he is equipping the church for the intimidation of the rulers, the nations and the peoples, he goes all the way back to Psalm 2 and quotes from it.

Why do the nations rage? Why do the peoples plot? Why do the kings and the rulers assemble together, not to praise the sovereign God, but to assault God in His sovereignty and His Son, His Anointed, King of Kings? Then Peter says ‘Do you see Herod, Pontius Pilot, the rulers, kings, the Jewish and Gentile people for they have the Son, the Anointed One where they can put their hands upon Him and they enrage, plot, have conspiracies, assault and assemble together against Him? He goes to a cross and yet the Lord is accomplishing what He predestined from all

eternity. In their plots is nothing but vanity for God takes their plots and accomplishes His purposes through His Anointed One, King of Kings and Lord of Lords who on that cross provides our redemption and refuge. Make no mistake what the nations, peoples, and kings have done throughout the ages who did at that moment when Jesus Christ was in Jerusalem, they continue it for see what they have done to us, but we will continue in the Spirit, not to be marginalized or intimidated, to speak the Gospel of the Kingdom in the Name of the Sovereign King of Kings to the peoples, nations, kings and rulers of this world. We shall do so from the boldness that doesn't come from self-confidence but from Spirit of God confidence.'

It is my opinion that Peter has pointed us in the right direction. Peter tells us that David by the Holy Spirit wrote Psalm 2 in this passage in Acts. Peter points us to Psalm 2 so that is what we are going to do in this study for a closer look at what Peter quotes in part and applies even in a situation that is applicable for us today. Psalm 1 and 2 by the way are very interesting. Unlike the rest of the Psalms they have no title. Interestingly all the other Psalms have titles that either contain who wrote the Psalm, the context in which it was written or musical directions to those who conducted the singing of that Psalm but not Psalm 1 and 2.

Here is why I think there are no titles for Psalm 1 and 2. Psalm 1 is a world and life view Psalm to tell you that there are basically two categories of humanity in this world. As we are born lost in our sins there are some who by God's grace put their trust in the living God and according to Psalm 1:1-3 it says *[1] Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; [2] but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. [3] He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.* There is another group in humanity who are also born sinners and revel in their rebellion against God. They do not surrender to Him therefore they are not like trees planted by streams of water but according to Psalm 1:4 *[4] The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.* They are gone into the judgment of God for all eternity.

What Psalm 1 does with humanity Psalm 2 does with the nations of the world. Psalm 2 gives us the scope of the nations of the world. You will see the rhetorical questions in Psalm like, 'why do the nations rage?' and 'why do the kings of the earth set themselves against the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords?' and 'why do the peoples plot?' and 'why do the rulers assemble against the Lord?' How should we respond? That is very important for us today. There are two facts – one is an observation of God's signal providences to this nation and the other is an observation of our contemporary situation.

In God's kind providence you live in a nation that has not taken its place to take counsel and plot to be against the Lord. It's not a perfect nation but an imperfect nation. It has a lot of sins and other things but because of God's redeeming grace and His common grace that restrains this nation, up until now this nation has said 'no' to state-ism, meaning the state is god and has said 'yes' to being under God. It does not mean the state is to become the church. It just means the state does its job under God. So because the state has said they are limited in their authority and will not take the place of God or go above God, they are under God which means they protect the unalienable rights that God gives, protect the people, punish evil and affirm what is good. With imperfection and many things that need to be repented of that has been the trajectory of this nation and it has maintained that trajectory because of God's ministry through His Church – an imperfect church that has had to deal with its own issues in this nation – which has been an instrument to proclaim truth and grace.

Therefore we have been in a nation that has been influenced by the church with redeeming grace and common grace. Redeeming grace transforms sinners and common grace restrains sin. Because of that this nation has welcomed the church. The Lord blesses those who bless His people. Again it has been uneven, imperfect and all of those things to be pointed out but that has been the trajectory of this nation until now.

The contemporary situation is that this nation makes very clear now from its supposed kings, rulers and those in authority that we're not under God. In fact, God's place is what we will determine, not a God who determines our place. Just ask the people who are Christian pharmacists in our country who now have been told by the Supreme Court that if there is no free practice of religion whereby you don't participate in chemical abortions for you now have to do it. So you either have to compromise or get out of the business. I could go on with illustration after illustration. We are in a nation that is not persecuting Christians for you need to save that word for those who lose their lives but targeted Christians – their livelihood, their well-being. How did we get to that trajectory?

I want to suggest to you that it is inevitable unless the church is the church. Every nation ends up there. There was a time with all of its imperfections God's Church in this nation through its Gospel ministry of grace where redeeming grace is changing sinners and common grace that restrains sin in the public square and theology that the church had an influence in this nation but it's no longer. The reason why is, that the church does not influence the world because the world is now influencing the church and we're being conformed to the world instead of transformed. We are not a transforming agent. The salt isn't salty. The light is not bright.

When you pray and sing in prayer 'God shed Thy grace' on this nation, remember His instrument to shed grace is you, me and His church. We are the instruments that He uses in the power of the Spirit and in the boldness of the Word. So what do we need to know and understand? There are four voices in Psalm 2 that are speaking loudly to us. Once we go through this I'll give you one takeaway and then we'll close. Let's start by looking at Psalm 2:1–3.

We hear the first voice, the voice of the nations, the peoples through the kings and rulers. Psalm 2:1–3 says [1] *Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?* [2] *The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying,* [3] *"Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us."* The nations here are making a universal statement – unless God's grace invades, transforms and restrains the nations rage. What do the peoples do? They plot. Here's a clue. Their plots and rage are vain, vanity. The whole book of Ecclesiastes in your Bible speaks of a life lived apart from God where all is vanity.

Here is my illustration of the vanity of rebellion against God. When I was a kid I went to the county fair because I had saved up two quarters which I had very specific things I would spend them on at the fair. One quarter I would use to go into this gigantic wooden stadium barrel that you climbed up and looked down in to see these people riding the largest motor cycles I had ever seen as they would defy gravity, at least to me they did, as they rode them around the inside of these huge barrels. The noise, roar and the shaking of the barrels were just thrilling to me. Then I would leave there to go to the concession stand where I would put down my quarter and watch this paper funnel being put down in this galvanized bowl as it went around and around this bowl. Before my eyes would come this cloud of glory on this funnel. I would say 'don't stop, keep going' as they put this funnel in this bowl. My eyes would get so big and I would bite into

it. Basically I just paid 25 cents for sugar coated air. There was a little moment of exhilaration and then emptiness – nothing, vanity.

In the momentary exhilaration of rebellion against the Lord and His anointed yet the plots are in vanity no matter how deep the rage. Then the kings assembled together but to rage and plot against God and His Anointed One. The rulers set themselves against the Lord of Glory. The kings give voice to the rage, the plots and the assembly of rebellion. It is not the assembly of worship. What does this voice say? It says ‘let us break the sovereign hand of God, sovereign Word of God and the sovereign law of God that is built on His character that tells us how to love Him and one another.’ We see that as the enmity of the sovereign self and the sovereign nation. So the sovereign nations, kings, rulers and peoples say they want to break apart everything about the sovereign God and render themselves from the cords of the Lord that bind them in His sovereignty. They want to embrace anarchy in the name of freedom.

What is the voice of the King? What is the voice of God as the kings and nations rage with all of their power, as the rulers assemble against Him, and as the peoples plot? How does God respond? The second voice is from God Himself and here is what it says in Psalm 2:4–6, *[4] He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. [5] Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, [6] “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.”* Seeing their plots, rebellion and rage, and as you see it developing in your own nation, how do you feel? You ought to feel the same security that God has because you are in Him. Let me illustrate this.

When I went East Carolina University I had a history professor and psychology professor that made an impression on me for I’m obviously talking about them years later. The psychology professor of Psychology 101 said “I’m going to teach you about human behavior but first of all I have to dismiss from your mind these vague, abstract, wishful notions of a God. He is not there. Now let’s get on with life.” My history professor said “I’m going to teach you about American History but the first thing I need to do is I need to cleanse you of these thoughts of a God who is involved in this nation.” Then he picks up a Bible and throws it to the back of the class and says ‘that’s what you need to think of Him and His Bible for He is not there.’ I’ll have to confess that, that was rather impressive and that which was an oddity back in the 1960s is now a common place perspective today of many in the academic world. I remember after I was converted and thought back on what they said, I chuckled.

When I picked up Carl Sagan’s treatise on atheism reading in its pages, ‘the cosmos – space, time and matter – that’s all there is, that’s all there was and that’s all there ever will be’ as he declares there is no God and says the trinity is space, time and matter. I laughed. Now when I think about the nation’s magazine Life and its headlines in the 1960s that said ‘God is Dead’ I laugh. Hear the Divine laughter in heaven of the vanity of man who would usurp the sovereign God of Glory. Their plans and rebellion are simply a matter of laughter.

Do you see those words ‘rage’ and ‘plot’ in this passage? Have you ever noticed when the atheist or those who believe in state-ism (not the state in its right function but state-ism as the messiah and deliverer) are in debates with Christians that most of the time the Christian is very settled and patient as they deal with them and then comes the rage of the atheistic evangelist of our day? Then there is Stephen Hawking who says ‘mathematically I’ve proven that there is no God. See the rage from those who don’t believe as they attempt to suppress what is true and professing to be wise they become fools and then rage in their foolishness. John Lennox who was here recently and debated was patient in his reasoning and do you know why?

Why are Christians able to be secure? One is because what they are saying is the truth for God is. Two, their God is secure so we who are in Him are secure. We don't have to rage in the irrationality that there was nothing that became something. God not only laughs but then speaks. He says 'you who have set yourself against Me, I set My Anointed One, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, on My hill, Zion, where not only was there the temple but also a place called Calvary for He is enthroned upon My throne.' When the sovereign God has set the King of Kings, then it is He rules and reigns.

I don't care what kings are appointed or what presidents are elected for He needs no vote to be elected because He is the One who elects. He uses Godly kings and ungodly kings, just read the history of Israel. Read the history of the world. He rules and reigns even when kings like Herod, Pontius Pilot, and Romans Caesars grab the King of Kings and send Him to a cross. They are only fulfilling what the Sovereign had predestined for the redemption of His people, what He is accomplishing. Then what do we find out about in the passage?

The third voice is the Anointed One, the King of Kings. What does He say? Psalm 2: 7–9 says [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 first thing the Anointed One does here is affirms His position and His Person. I am Your Son. I Am the Second Person of the Trinity. He is the Begotten One that has been sent on His mission of redemption as the King will now from the throne go to the cross and redeem His people from their sins. Then He will ascend back to the throne and all authority has been given to Him in heaven and on earth. He affirms with His spoken voice who He is. Clearly this isn't David or Solomon. David secured some land. Solomon secured the promises from the Euphrates all the way to the Gaza but this King is to the ends of the earth. This King is not over one nation but this King will have a heritage from all the nations. This is the King of David and the King of Kings, Christ Himself.

Not only does He affirm Himself but He assures us that He is now enthroned. Thirdly, He asks by Divine direction for His heritage from the nations. Think about what He is asking. What do the nations do? They rebel against the Lord. The King of whom they are rebelling against, as He goes to the cross He brings from the nations and the peoples that rage against Him, His inheritance to make us His Kingdom and a royal nation. He is bringing His inheritance from every tribe and nation, from the very places that raise up plots and vanity to assault Him.

Fourthly, in His voice He warns and announces to them that He will break them with His judgment, the way a rod of iron would break the vessels of a potter. You cannot break God's law without God breaking you. Those who would break in pieces God's sovereign glory and majesty will be broken. Some will be broken by grace and will come to Him as a heritage from the nations. The rest will be broken in the judgment when the King returns and His throne in heaven is enthroned in the new heavens and the new earth. They are cast away into utter and final judgment. That brings me to the fourth voice.

The fourth voice is your voice and my voice. It is the voice of the Psalmist. What does our voice say in the midst of nations devoid of grace and rebel against the Lord in the midst of the truth that God holds such vanity and He has set His King on His holy hill? That King's voice that declares to the world that He will save His people from these nations and then He will bring judgment against all peoples and nations who stand against Him. Here is our voice in Psalm 2:10–12 which says, [10] *Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. [11] Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. [12] 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.*

He says that our voice is to be uttered in the name of the King of Kings to the kings, rulers, and peoples of these nations. He tells us to say five things to them. One is that we say to them to be wise (in terms of what your role is) for it is the fool who has said there is no God. Second is 'be warned' for the God of glory will bring His judgment against any and all who do not take refuge in Him. The third thing we say is 'serve this Lord with fear.' How do kings and rulers of nations serve the Lord? They serve the Lord not by trying to be the church or the family but by being the state. It is not state-ism where we are the lord but by being under God. The state is there in a broken world to protect the people of God in their God-given inalienable rights, to punish what is evil and to affirm what is good. A nation under God becomes a minister of God for that very purpose – nothing more, nothing less. Stand in the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom.

The fourth thing we are to do is rejoice with trembling. Philippians 2:12 says [12] *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*** That is worship language. Don't worship the state. God is to be worshipped and served with fear and trembling. Fifthly He wants us to kiss the Son, lest He be angry and then you perish in the way. In other words, your nation won't be here any longer. Your dreams perish O peoples. Your nations perish. Kiss the Son. His wrath is quickly kindled but notice the display of it is that He is patient that in His patience we might be led to repentance. His patience allows us to exist in His grace that we might repent. Then He says to the peoples and the nations who take refuge in Him that they are blessed. If you don't take refuge in Him, then He will break you pieces and you will perish in the way.

It is very difficult for us because we don't have a king so it's hard for us to understand this. There used to be an Elizabeth the II who was enthroned. At the stone of destiny under the service guided by the Arch Bishop of Canterbury all the people of power, nobility and elite would be ushered to Queen Elizabeth to kneel and kiss the queen or king. They would pledge their allegiance, affection and "fealty" that is they would die for the realm/kingdom and their queen or king. That is why when British people go into battle they say 'for God, the country and the king.' Our veterans when they go into battle say 'for God and country' because we don't have a king. Our king is the constitution, the law. So a lot of us aren't familiar with the language of 'kiss the son' but all you need to do is look at I Samuel 10. When Saul was installed and anointed Samuel kissed the king.

So America and all the nations of the world, kiss the Son. Kneel and surrender, for you are not God. Your plots are vanity. He is the King. It doesn't mean you are the church or the family. You're the state under God so surrender and affirm Him as King of Kings, His cross and His crown otherwise you perish in the way. In closing I want to give you a takeaway.

If you grasp what I have just shared with you, there is this inevitable trajectory that nations that do not kiss the Son will always rise up to be god or above God and will assault the sovereign God, the King of Kings in their rage and plots. Peoples who do not surrender will rage and plot against Him so the inevitable trajectory of men, women and nations apart from God's grace will be against God and His Anointed. But there is a sure promise that if you take refuge in this King you are blessed. So here is your takeaway.

The takeaway is there is a throne in heaven and it is not empty for the King is set upon it but it was empty for a moment in time. When it was empty, from that throne that King came

into this world to go to a cross so that you could have refuge from His wrath by being in Him. All who are not in Him (the King) will be broken in His judgment and His wrath. Where is your hope? Your hope is in that King. Your hope is not in this nation or its power (military or economic) or its elected officials or yourself. Because that King left that throne and went to a cross to die for your sins, you can actually find refuge from that King in that King. Kiss the Son. Nations find your refuge being under God and not opposed to God or exalted above God. People of God find your refuge in the King so that you will not be under the judgment of that King.

These nations have risen up and their pomposity declares their opposition of God and Christians. In their judgment for over 2000 years they have killed Christians yet for every martyr that has been slain new believers come from the nations of this world. The blood of the martyrs has become the nourishment for the soil of the Kingdom of God. Those in opposition are those who are in the grave and Christ, His Church and Christianity stand over it. There is a throne in heaven that is not empty for the Savior has risen. Hear Him. Ask if the Father.

Matthew 28:18–20 says [18] *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* Those nations that rage, bring disciples from them. Jesus says 'I have a heritage that I have purchased from the cross.' Warn them if they bow not to this King for He will destroy them in His judgment. Today is a day you can find refuge in Him.

So the kings proclaim, announce and declare the obituary of Christianity and the church but the church prevails and Christ is risen and enthroned. Assyria, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, the Third Reich, are no more and the atheistic communist nations are either no more or are becoming no more. If this nation decides to join that parade and that trajectory then this nation will become a footnote in history. Our God does not exist to make America great. Our Savior is great. America kiss the Son and take your refuge in Him.

My dear brothers and sisters, raise your voice to warn them and to plead with them. There is a King with whom you have to do in this day, kiss the Son. Take your refuge in Him. He left that throne to be nailed to a cross and took the wrath due to you that you might not have to take wrath from Him but grace can be yours. If not the pomposity of any nation, including this one, is nothing more than a derisive laugh and vanity, no matter how much the rage or military and economic power they perish in the way, but the King lives so raise your voice for the King, for the cross and the crown of Christ. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, give us the sensibilities that Peter had to understand this Psalm in his day, even as we would understand it in our day and may we take this message to the world. If you are reading this today and you have heard of a King that left His throne and went to the cross so that you might have refuge in Him from His holy wrath, then come, kneel, surrender and kiss the Son whose grace has kissed the justice of God and satisfied it that you can be saved. Father, I pray that we Your people will find our voice and not be silent. We will speak to the kings of this world the Gospel of saving grace and the Gospel of restrained grace and call them to repent and kiss the Son to serve Him with fear and rejoice in Him with trembling. O God, give us by Your Spirit with Your Word a voice for the King of Kings to the kings of this world, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

## Power Point

### FOUR VOICES FROM PSALM 2

- I. The Voice of the Kings (vs.1–3)
- II. The Voice to the Kings (vs.4–6)
- III. The Voice of the King (vs.7–9)
- IV. The Voice to the Kings (vs.10–12)

### LIFE TAKEAWAY

There is a throne in Heaven and it is not now empty, though thankfully it has been.