

Two Ways Before Us, Part Two, Psalm 2
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Introduction

Good morning, my name is Brad and I'm one of the pastors here. Last week we kicked off a three-month emphasis on one of our five identities as a church, that of Worshipers. Guiding us through this emphasis isn't just our four-week trainings (which by the way, guys of all ages, yours begins this Tuesday night); the heartbeat is a sermon series in the book of Psalms, which we've subtitled, "Seeing All of Life Through the Lens of the Gospel".

You may be wondering what's the meaning of the series artwork. Well, we want to explain it because there's intentionality behind it. The bust of the man comes from the statue of David, a famous depiction of the biblical David at a young age. We used that because David is not only the author of many of the Psalms, he was a man after God's own heart whose life was characterized by the worship of the Lord. We then superimposed glasses on him to align with our theme of worship being a lens through which we see all of life.

Today will in many ways be a continuation of last week's message as we follow up Psalm 1 with Psalm 2, which you can find on page 448 if you're using one of the Bibles in the chairs. Some scholars even believe that these two psalms were originally intended to be one. Regardless of whether we take them to be one or two, what *is* clear is that they work together to provide a fitting introduction to the rest of the book.¹ If you happen to miss either of these foundational sermons, I would encourage you to take time to catch up on the recordings on our website.

In light of all that, the title of today's sermon is simply "Two Ways Before Us, Part Two". The dramatic poetry of Psalm 2 flows very much like the script of a play with four acts, so we're gonna break it down this way:

- 1) The Nations Rage - vv. 1-3
- 2) The Lord Laughs - vv. 4-6
- 3) The Son Rules - vv. 7-9

¹ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 60

4) The Psalmist Warns - vv. 10-12²

The main idea, you'll see, aligns with the main idea from last week: A happy, fruitful, enduring life is built [not just on the written word of God, but the living word of God; in other words,] on the Son of God. With that said, if you are able, please stand with me to honor the reading of God's word. Again, today's passage is Psalm 2. Church, hear the word of the Lord:

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."*

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."*

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."*

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. Psalm 2

² Craigie, 64-65

And as you'll remember from last week, let's say our new liturgy together, which is a declaration that holy Scripture is to be read as coming from God as his voice.

[Leader:] *The Lord has spoken to us.* [Congregation:] *Thanks be to God!* You may be seated.

Exposition

As I mentioned last week, one of the unique ways we want to approach this series is by beginning each sermon with a “cultural lens,” which is a routine in our culture that (whether we realize it or not) shapes what we worship. And not just any cultural lens, but one that contrasts sharply with the worship lens given to us by a particular psalm. This week's cultural lens is represented by the term, “choose your own adventure”.

The key example I want to lean on comes from a Netflix series called Black Mirror. (This is not an endorsement—I have not watched it, but it is known for its dark themes.) There's this standalone film from the series titled, “Bandersnatch,” which allows you the viewer to make life decisions for the main character. At different points in the film two options pop up at the bottom of the screen and you have ten seconds to choose (if you don't choose, one of the options is selected for you). The choices that you make then directly impact the life of the main character, for better or worse. It's this fascinating and weird experience of ruling over someone's life.³

Of course, this isn't the only place in our culture where we experience the appeal of “choose your own adventure”. Video games give us this sense of false reality, as well as app stores and malls and even just the vast infrastructure of America's highways. It's anything that involves you ruling sovereignly over a buffet of options, which on a tactile level, often means applying your thumb to a remote or controller of some sort. Think of the more ancient version of a Roman caesar giving either the thumbs up of pardon or the thumbs down of execution. Now, don't hear me as preaching against these things, but instead as encouraging you to grapple with how they shape what you worship. They subtly teach you to see life through this lens: “When faced with authority you don't like, choose your own adventure.”

Obviously, this sounds a lot like last week because it's part two of Psalms' introduction. The difference is, where Psalm 1 came from the angle of wisdom, Psalm 2 comes from

³ Black Mirror: Bandersnatch, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9495224/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1

perspective of prophecy. It points ultimately to a promised Savior through God's covenant with David.⁴ In that covenant we read,

'Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. ⁹ And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ¹⁰ And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹ from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. ¹² When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, 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. ¹⁴ I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, ¹⁵ but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. ¹⁶ And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.' 2 Samuel 7:8-16

I know that's a lot to read, but it lays a necessary foundation. That's because Psalm 2 is royal psalm; it focuses on Israel's king, specifically King David and the time of his coronation. And what it described for God's Old Testament people was the authority of God and his king over not just Israel, but all nations. This was because the king had been appointed by God, as though the king were his very own son. What we see, then, is how people like us respond to such divine authority, and more importantly, how divine authority responds to us.⁵

1) The Nations Rage - vv. 1-3

This brings us to our first act in the script, the nations rage. Read with me in verse 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,*

⁴ Craigie, 60; W. S. Plumer, *Psalms*, Geneva Series Commentaries (Chelsea: Sheridan, 2016), 37

⁵ Craigie, 64

³ “Let us burst their bonds apart
and cast away their cords from us.” Psalm 2:1-3

The scene of Psalm 2 begins straightway with conflict. If the setting was a ship, this would be the secret murmuring of a mutiny. The nations of the earth and their governments are pictured as raging and plotting, and so the psalmist begs us to observe it by asking the question, “Why?” Now, there are a couple ways for us to process this leading question:

- First, “Why?” as in why are they so disturbed? Well, the occasion is that God has anointed a king for his people. In an ideal world, the nations of the earth and their kings would acknowledge the primacy of the one, true God and his appointed king. But in a sinful world where the nations worshiped other gods, the appointment of God’s king was immediately offensive and threatening. Why? In a word: *authority*. The Lord is one who according to Hosea 11 leads with cords of kindness and bands of love, who eases the yoke on our jaws, who bends down to feed us; or as Jesus puts it, his yoke is easy and his burden is light.⁶ But to our sinful, mutinous hearts, absolute divine authority is offensive because it threatens our rule. And that’s why nations around God’s Old Testament people constantly warred with them.⁷
- But there’s a second “Why?” to consider here, as in why in the world would you rage against divine authority? To continue the thought of Psalm 1, why would you scoff at the law of the Lord, let alone his anointed king? Why would you think, “This is gonna work out well for me”? Why would you abandon the promise of becoming like a prosperous tree planted by streams of living water?⁸

And if you find yourself on that path or considering that path today, let me just echo the psalmist’s question to the nations: “Why?”

2) The Lord Laughs - vv. 4-6

Because here’s what those nations learned over and over: just because you want to live like God’s authority isn’t real, it doesn’t make it any less real. This brings us to our second act in the script of Psalm 2: the Lord laughs. We read beginning in verse 4 that in response to nations,

⁶ Hosea 11:4; Matthew 11:30

⁷ Craigie, 65-66; Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973), 66-67; Plumer, 40

⁸ Psalm 1:3; John 7:38; Kidner, 66; Plumer, 39

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.” Psalm 2:4-6

Similar to the question of “Why?” there are a couple of ways we can process the Lord’s laughter:

- For one, it’s laughter at the absurdity of creatures rebelling against their Creator. As one pastor has said, “When the Lord laughs, ain’t nothing funny.” Isaiah 40 tells us that the Lord “sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers.” So, what we have is mutiny by grasshoppers. The threat is such a joke that the best response is just a good laugh.⁹
- But it’s more than that. There’s a clear sense here that the Lord is mocking them with his laughter. Why? That doesn’t sound like a very kind thing to do. What he’s mocking is that nations and governments think they have the remote and can choose their own adventure—but he’s about to push *one button* and terrify them all.

What was that button? In this context, it was the installation of his king on Zion, in other words, the king of Israel enthroned in Jerusalem.¹⁰ That’s the significance of all these stories of kings throughout the Old Testament—and all the blood and battles that go with them. Many people take that as proof that the Bible is bogus, but it’s actually evidence that something eternally significant was happening. Nations couldn’t just ignore God’s king; they were terrified and enraged because heaven was confronting earth, telling them, “In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and trust shall be your strength”—but they would have none of it.¹¹

3) The Son Rules - vv. 7-9

This brings us to the third act in this drama: the son rules. In response to the nations, now it’s the newly appointed king’s turn to speak. What’s he gonna say? We read in verse 7,

⁹ Plumer, 41

¹⁰ Craigie, 66; Kidner, 67

¹¹ Isaiah 30:15-17

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." Psalm 2:7-9*

It turns out the king talks very little of his own smack. Instead, he reads from a "decree," which was an announcement from his coronation. It's this announcement that explains God's covenant with him. Why's he doing this? Because what authority does he have apart from the Lord? And yet *with* the Lord, look at what he's able to say: "The Lord said to me, 'You are my Son'"—in other words, "The one, true God, *he's my Father.*" It's like an ancient way of saying, "My Dad can beat up your dad."¹²

What we're talking about here is the concept of sonship. God's relationship with his Old Testament people was meant to be like a father to a son. And so, God's relationship with his Old Testament king was also meant to be like a father to a son. That doesn't mean the king was divine, but that he was promised certain privileges that all he had to do was ask for. One of those privileges was to have authority over all nations who submitted to the Lord, and to dash to pieces those that didn't.¹³

And that may seem harsh, but that's the reality of how absolute authority works. If you try to live outside of it, you get crushed. It may seem like tyranny, but it's not, because this authority is good instead of evil. And so, submission to it is for our good. All this shows us God's heart and intentions toward all nations, even from the time of the Old Testament. In recognizing God's authority through his king and putting themselves in submission to him, they could've shared in life and blessing.

Consider the example of the Queen of Sheba from 1 Kings 10. Having heard about the wisdom of David's son, King Solomon, she came to inspect it herself. And after observing everything, the Bible tells us it took her breath away. She said, "⁸ Happy are your men! Happy are your servants, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! ⁹ Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the

¹² Craigie, 67; Kidner, 67-68

¹³ Craigie, 67

throne of Israel! Because the Lord loved Israel forever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness.”¹⁴ Sounds a lot like Psalm 1.

So, what we learn here is that God’s throne of grace is no less glorious and inspiring than his throne of judgment. It crushes us in the best of ways, breaking down our pride and bringing us to God—if we’re willing to be crushed by it.¹⁵

4) The Psalmist Warns - vv. 10-12

And it leads us to the fourth and final act of this psalm: the psalmist warns. We read in verse 10,

*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. Psalm 2:10-12

Here is basically a summarization of both Psalms 1 and 2:

- “Now, therefore, O kings, be wise”—in the face of two ways, choose the right way!
- And “be warned, O rulers of the earth”—in the face of two authorities, choose to right authority!

The appropriate response to the truth of these psalms is to serve the Lord with fear, and to rejoice with trembling. But what does that even mean? It means we should “Kiss the Son”. In other words, we should pay homage to God’s anointed one, not just outwardly, but from our hearts. We should genuinely consider his authority and power and what that means for those who don’t submit. This is completely opposite the behavior of the kings and nations addressed at the beginning of this psalm, who have only their fake, self-realized sense of authority in mind.¹⁶

¹⁴ 1 Kings 10:8-9

¹⁵ Plumer, 46

¹⁶ Craigie, 67-68; Kidner, 68-69

And look at how the message ties back into Psalm 1. Our lens for all of life is to be paying homage to God's anointed son and king, so that we don't "perish in the way," like the wicked who in the middle of their chosen path are suddenly snuffed out like chaff that the wind drives away.¹⁷ And it's lens that doesn't just mean trembling, but rejoicing, because "Blessed [or happy] are all who take refuge in" God's anointed son, just like the blessed man of Psalm 1. And so we sum up the opening lens of the book Psalms with this: a happy, fruitful, enduring life is built not just on the word of God, but on the Son of God.

However, because of sin not only in the hearts of pagan nations and kings, but also in God's own nation and kings, this was an ideal that never became a complete reality. Over and over in the Old Testament we read about kings who were beloved sons but did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, their Father. And so, when we read this psalm in context there's a mixture of emotions: awe over the power the king could've had; disappointment over the rule that didn't really happen; and longing for the true Son and King.

Conclusion

If this is where we are to end our studies of Psalm 2, well, then, perhaps we should all perhaps pack up our homes and move to Israel. And when we arrive there, head to the Wailing Wall, the last remaining portion of the Old Testament temple accessible to Jews, and there cry out for God's promised savior. But if we are to read this psalm through the lens of the entire Bible, then we know that a Savior has already come, and Psalm 2 speaks of him.¹⁸

When the kingdom of Israel splintered in half and finally crumbled altogether into exile, God began speaking to his people of a new covenant, and a new kind of kingdom; one in which they wouldn't just delight in the law of the Lord, but have it written on their hearts.¹⁹ And when Jesus Christ began his public ministry among the people of Israel, listen to his very first recorded words in the Gospel of Mark:

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." Mark 1:15

The kingdom was at hand, because *the King* was at hand.

¹⁷ Plumer, 47

¹⁸ Plumer, 37

¹⁹ Jeremiah 31:31-34

And if we are to wonder at how much the authority of God's anointed king of Israel made ancient nations rage, then we ain't seen nothin' yet. Because nothing in all of heaven or earth has provoked the rebellion of humanity more than the Person of Jesus Christ. How could this be—in the eyes of the world he was a nobody in the middle of nowhere! And yet it is described best by a group of persecuted Christians who prayed,

“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. Acts 4:24-28²⁰

Jesus didn't just provoke individuals, he set off kings and nations—one would say later that by way of his followers he had turned the whole world upside down.²¹ And he still does today. Why? Because *he* is the true Anointed One of Psalm 2.

And truth be told, we want to be that. I mean, you often can't really see it—until Jesus comes around (note: not philosopher Jesus, but King Jesus²²). Then watch conversations turn awkward and relationships get sideways and people say things like, “I'm tired of being told what to do.” We want to rule sovereignly over a buffet of options; we want to hoard the remote control of our lives; we want to sit in the judgment seat of who gets pardon and who gets execution; we want to be the chosen one. But when confronted with Jesus and his kingdom, it signals the death of our kingdom. The false reality of “choose your own adventure” is revealed for the lie that it is.

And if you listen for the voice of God in his word, you can hear him not yelling, but laughing as we grasshoppers plan our mutiny. That's because *Jesus* is the chosen One, the One of whom we read over and over,

²⁰ Plumer, 40-41

²¹ Acts 17:6

²² Plumer, 40

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Matthew 3:17; 17:5; Mark 1:11; 9:7; Luke 3:22; 9:35

He was the only begotten Son, the King set on Zion, God’s holy hill. And it was proven, not because Jesus came as just another socio-political figure to restore the kingdom of Israel through his life, but because he came as a God-man to restore all nations through his death. David’s coronation ceremony no doubt concluded on the same day it began, but Jesus’ carried on until a final climactic moment: when he rose from the dead. And so it could be decreed,

we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, ³³ this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm,

*“ ‘You are my Son,
today I have begotten you.’ Acts 13:32-33²³*

That psalm continues, “Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.” Why do we think that Jesus went on to command his followers to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations”?²⁴ Because all authority in heaven and on earth had been given to him! This is the whole basis for global missions.²⁵ We have been a church who is passionate about God’s mission to all peoples both locally and globally. The power behind this isn’t that we are saviors who can change the world by our strength of will, but because we are caught up in the mission of One who has all authority. Therefore we can go and proclaim boldly and sacrificially, knowing that our King will use it to harden the hearts of some and soften the hearts of others, all for his glory. This global work is what we were made for!

And if we doubt this because we don’t yet see all things in submission to his authority, remember, just like the universal rule of the king of Israel wasn’t fully realized, we too are awaiting the day of the Son’s return, a day when we can say,

*“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
who is and who was,
for you have taken your great power
and begun to reign.*

²³ Kidner, 68

²⁴ Matthew 28:19

²⁵ Kidner, 68; Plumer, 45

¹⁸ *The nations raged,
but your wrath came,
and the time for the dead to be judged,
 and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints,
and those who fear your name,
both small and great,
 and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.” Revelation 11:17-18*

Now therefore, be wise (Psalm 1), and be warned (Psalm 2). 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—but *blessed are all who take refuge in him.*²⁶

Church, be reminded of your refuge again. On the night that he was betrayed, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, broke it and said to his disciples, “This is my body, which is broken for you; eat this in remembrance of me.” He also took a cup of wine, and after blessing it, gave it to his disciples and said, “This cup is the new covenant marked by the shedding of my blood. For as often as you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you announce the Lord’s death until he returns.” **Today we are announcing that Jesus Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.**²⁷

Our tradition here at Antioch is to come forward and break off a piece of bread and dip it in the juice. There will be stations here in the front; gluten-free bread will be available to your right. If you’re a baptized believer, come and remember who you are and whose you are. If you’re a believer but not yet baptized, before coming to the table, we would love to help you first come and declare your faith publicly through baptism. If you’re not a Christian, this sacred symbol is not for you, but rather than taking communion, we encourage you to take Christ. He has made himself available to you this very moment. There will be pastors in the back to talk and pray with you about any need you have. Let’s pray.

²⁶ Craigie, 68-69

²⁷ Revelation 19:11-16

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