

Psalm 2. Bethesda Coffee Morning. 2 July 2014.

As those of you who were here last week will know, we have just begun a new series of talks based on a selection of Psalms taken from the book of that name. This is the second of those talks and this morning we shall be looking at a few verses in the second Psalm.¹ But, first, I shall read the Psalm itself.

Why do the nations rage² and the people plot a vain thing?

The kings of the earth set themselves in array, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, "Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us".

He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision.

Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure: "Yet I have set my King on my holy hill of Zion".

"I will declare the decree: the Lord has said to me, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; you shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel'".

Now therefore, be wise, O kings; be instructed, you judges 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, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.

As you will note, this psalm of David is a very full psalm and covers a lot of ground – the greater part of which we shall not have time to consider today.³

We will focus on just two of the expressions concerning the Lord Jesus which receive their clear and unmistakable fulfilment in the New Testament. The first draws our attention to His unique relationship to God, and the second to His undeserved rejection by men.

First then, His unique relationship to God, as we note the words of the Saviour, spoken prophetically here: 'The Lord has said to me, 'You are my Son'. And we find these actual words spoken by God twice to our Lord when He was in the world. The one occasion was at our Lord's baptism in the River Jordan at the commencement of what is often termed 'His public ministry' – which lasted for something over three years from when He was about 30 years of age until just before His crucifixion and death.

'When He had been baptized', we read, 'Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and ... suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son"'.⁴

The other occasion was on the so-called Mount of Transfiguration, towards the close of His public ministry. This time we read that 'Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them ... and behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah ... and, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son"'.⁵

It has been well said that, if at the Jordan the Father distinguished our Lord from some of the worst of men, on the mount He distinguished Him from some of the best of men. But both occasions have in common that they point us to Jesus' unique relationship to God. One New Testament writer underlined this unique relationship for us when he posed the rhetorical question, 'to which of the angels did (God) ever say: "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"?'⁶

Second, we read of our Lord's undeserved rejection by men: 'The kings of the earth set themselves in array, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed'.

In the New Testament Book of Acts these words are applied to the concerted opposition of all – both Jews and Gentiles – to the Lord Jesus, which led to His crucifixion and death. We read there – in Acts chapter 4 – that, in the face of threats and persecution, the early Christians 'raised their voice to God ... and said: "Lord, you are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who said by the mouth of your servant David: "Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ". For truly against your holy Servant Jesus, whom you *anointed*, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together,⁷ to do whatever ... your counsel had determined before should come to pass'.⁸

Did you notice that last bit? 'To do whatever ... your counsel had determined before should come to pass'. That is, this prayer of the early Christians turns our eyes from the council-chambers of men to the eternal council-chamber of God. For He, God, we are being told, had *permitted* the confederacy against Himself and against the Lord Jesus which culminated in His Son's agony on the cross.

And we know why. For, in the words of what may well be the best known verse in the Bible, 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life'. That is, He gave the One who, as we noted just now, stands in an altogether unique relationship to Himself – the One He twice declared to be 'my beloved Son' – He gave Him to suffer the hostility of men, climaxing in the cross, when He, the Lord Jesus suffered the very wrath of God against our sins – that we might not perish but enjoy eternal life.

But as our Psalm notes, those who conspired against God's Christ would not have the last word. For the Psalm directs our gaze away from the council-chambers of men to the throne-room of 'the Majesty in heaven,'⁹ far beyond the reach and range of men's threats and vain efforts. And there, we read, 'He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision'.

The Most High is certainly not disturbed or dismayed by men's malice – for, as another psalm assures us, 'The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all'.¹⁰ As we read, He 'shall laugh' – not in humour and amusement, but in contempt and scorn at man's opposition and aggression.

And, while puny men rage against Him on earth, the Omnipotent One calmly mocks their clenched fists.

For, in spite of all that men may say or do, He rests assured that His own purpose stands secure. It will not be – it cannot be – thwarted and overthrown. 'I have set my King', He declares, 'upon my holy hill'. Make no mistake, God's Anointed is appointed, and one day He shall rule on earth even as He now does in heaven.¹¹

And David closes his psalm by inviting the only sensible response which anyone can make to these things. 'Now therefore, be wise ... Kiss the Son (pay homage to Him,¹² submit to Him), lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him'. Yes, one day the Lord's vast longsuffering will end, and He will execute judgement on a hostile and rebellious world. But, as I hope you noted, David points, not only to the folly of resisting the Lord, but to the blessedness of trusting Him.

For, just as there is no refuge *from* Him, so there is no other refuge but *in* Him. I gladly let the last words of the psalm speak for themselves ... 'Blessed (and blessed, indeed, beyond all measure) are all those who put their trust in Him'.

Footnotes

¹ Compare, '... as also it is written in *the second Psalm*, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"', Acts 13. 33.

² The nations are seen in a state of 'tumultuous agitation' as when waves of ocean are lashed to fury in their opposition to God and to Christ, vainly seeking to throw off divine authority and restraint.

³ And in this psalm we hear no less than four different voices – namely that of the kings and rulers of the earth, that of the Lord God Himself, that of the Lord Jesus (God's Anointed – the word from which we derive the titles 'Messiah' and 'Christ' – and God's Son), and that of David, the author of the psalm, Acts 4. 25.

⁴ Matt. 3. 16-17.

⁵ Matt. 17. 1-5.

⁶ Heb. 1. 5.

⁷ 'The Gentiles, the Roman soldiers, gathered together, even multitudes of them, and came out with Judas at the head of them, with swords and staves, to apprehend Christ and bring Him to the chief priests and elders, Mat_26:47; these assembled together in Pilate's hall, when Christ was condemned to be crucified, and insulted Him'.

⁸ Acts 4. 24-27.

⁹ Heb. 8. 1.

¹⁰ Psalm 103. 19. I read once of a printer's error in the program of a performance of Handel's Messiah. It listed the Hallelujah Chorus as reading, by the inclusion of an unwanted letter 's', 'The Lord God Omnipotent resigneth!' But God hasn't resigned. As Handel correctly quoted, 'The Lord God Omnipotent Reigneth'. And we can rest in the certain knowledge that no matter what is happening in the world, our nation, or our individual lives, He knows all about it and has the situation under His control. And we can trust Him. Handel's friend and literary collaborator, Charles Jennens, wrote on 10 July 1741: 'Handel says he will do nothing next Winter, but I hope I shall persuade him to set another Scripture Collection I have made for him ... The Subject is Messiah...'. During that summer Handel received an invitation to visit Ireland later in the year, and this prompted him to begin work on Jennens's 'Messiah' text. he began work on 22 August, and by 28 August he had drafted part I, by 6 September part II, and part III is dated 12 September. The completion of the instrumentation took a further two days.

¹¹ The Lord and His Messiah are invincible.

¹² Compare 1 Sam. 10. 1.