

Sermon for Sunday, May 29, 2011
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The Lord Reigns
Psalm 2

1. We wonder if God reigns

We need to put Psalm 2 in context in two ways. The first is personal: Psalm 2 says God is enthroned in heaven and has installed his king on earth (2:4, 6). But we wonder: "Does God really reign?" The earth quakes and waves tower up and kill. The skies pour out rain and farms flood. Tornadoes tear up town and country. Rapid communication magnifies the sense of chaos, as we hear of tragedies right away. Human folly is a factor, as we build things that seem destined to fall. But still, if God reigns, why so much destruction?

A trip to the hospital puts the question more insistently. After visiting the ICU on one floor, I hop to the ICU on another floor... Lost in thought, I almost step on the heel of a man who is walking slowly. I look; he's young. Why so slow? Oh, he only has one leg. Perhaps he was a soldier. It's easy to wonder, "Does God reign?"

In Israel, the question had an edge we don't feel in America: If God reigns and we are his people, why are we attacked, even defeated by neighboring nations? This is not the way things are supposed to be."

These questions are the personal context for Psalm 2. Psalm 2 does not explain why evil abounds. It does acknowledge the problem of evil. And it asserts that God does reign, even in the face of evil.

Psalm 2 also has context in Scripture. Psalms 1-2 introduces many themes from the book of psalms. Psalm 1 focuses on personal life inside the covenant. Psalm 2 focuses on life in the world, but Psalms 1-2 are so closely connected that many read them as one psalm with two parts. Both describe two ways of life:

- Psalm 1 says "the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish" (1:6).
- The righteous delight in God's law, meditate on it, bear fruit and prosper (1:2-3).
- But the wicked, sit in the seat of scoffers. "They are like chaff that the wind blows away... [They] will not stand in the judgment" (1:2, 5).

There are two ways personally (Ps 1) and two ways to live in the world (Ps 2). The kings and nations of the earth "gather together against the LORD and his Anointed" in cosmic revolt. God counters with the righteous man, His "anointed" – the Messiah, God's Son (2.2, 7). (cf. Boice 22)

2. The Lord is indeed the enthroned ruler

Psalm 2 is a royal psalm, about God's king. It's a psalm of David Acts 44:25 and it's a prophetic psalm, about Jesus. The message comes through four speakers:

- First, the nations gather against God's and his king to rebel. They say, "Let us break their chains" 2:1-3.
- Second, the Lord rebukes them and replies "I have installed my King..." 2:4-6.

- Third, the king reports what the Lord told him, "You are my Son... and I will make the nations your inheritance" (2:7-9).
- Fourth, the author of the psalm addresses the rebels: "Be warned, you rulers... Serve the Lord with fear... Kiss the Son" 2:10-12. Let's trace it out...

Psalm 2 envisions a day when God's king is challenged. Perhaps he has just taken the throne and his foes think he is weak. Perhaps they see a momentary opportunity. Regardless, the nations conspire, kings and rulers rise against the Lord and his anointed. They hope to break the so-called "chains" of God's rule.

These words were very real for David and Solomon. The people around Israel – Philistines, Amalekites, Syrians - attacked David early in his reign. David subjugated the nations and there was peace for a time, but they rebelled against David's son Solomon late in his reign. Both David and Solomon were God's anointed. Indeed, the nations kept plotting until Assyrians smashed Israel in 722 B.C. and the Babylonians smashed Judah in 586 B.C.

Psalm 2 says these attacks on Israel are ultimately an attempt to overthrow God and his Anointed king: "Let us break their chains." There is a fury in the threats and a glory in the promises of Psalm 2.

These wars represent the whole of human rebellion. Therefore God is angry, his wrath flares, his rebuke terrifies. But the promises are so magnificent that only Jesus can fulfill them: "I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession" 2:8.

Verse 2:1 asks "Why do the nation conspire?" The language is vivid; they raise a commotion (ragash). They plot (hagah): same word as meditate. They mutter and murmur, ponder and plan. They talk to themselves about their rebellion¹ Why? They don't believe God is good. They don't think he exercises his authority for our good. But his truth sets us free; his law brings perfect freedom (John 8:32, Jas 1:25).²

Eventually "The discontent slowly clarifies into resolve." So the nations rebel against God's "chains." Jesus says he has an easy yoke. God has "cords of compassion" (Matt 12. Hos:11:4). The wicked see fetters and hope to throw them off.

I must ask: Can you see yourself here? Do you ever mutter, murmur, ponder, and plan? Do you ever talk yourself into believing that God's law oppresses you or that someone in authority is oppressing you? People talk themselves into seeing problems that aren't there. Look for the pattern of muttering, plotting, planning and rebellion in yourself and others. If you see it, don't follow. It can lead to full-blown rebellion. Psalm 2 says that rebellion against God certainly doesn't work.

The rebels don't overthrow God. God is sovereign. He is enthroned in heaven and laughs in derision at pitiful human efforts to overthrow him. Yes, the nations defeated Israel when they rebelled against God and forfeited his protection. But no one can achieve final success in rebellion against God. A toddler has a better chance of tackling a pro football player. The child

¹ Dottie 1:1006-7

² Kidner, Psalms, 1:50

assails him and he laughs. So God laughs, but "the only laughing matter is the arrogance itself, not the suffering it will cost before it ends"³

God scoffs, rebukes, and terrifies the wicked. This is something the wicked see at the hour of death. Oh, the difference in that hour! Some die in the strong hope of seeing Jesus. Their family grieves at their loss, yet they hope. But others die without hope; the abyss of death threatens to swallow them.

Whether people submit or resist, God still reigns. They murmur and plot, but he has the last word: "I have installed my king." Jesus is that king.

Still, rebellion against God's law seems feasible. Every day, people lie, cheat, steal, accuse, curse, nurse hatred and envy, and sleep in beds that aren't theirs. Sin is rebellion and people seem to get away with it. Yet there is a price: Lying, cheating, stealing and hatred cause life to fracture, fill it with misery. Further, God scoffs at rebels, rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, for rebellion has a cost (2:5-6).

The Lord reigns over the earth following outline of Futato, Praise, 102-112.

Years ago, some few radicals made a big show of their rebellion by walking through windows instead of doors. But no radical was seen walking through walls. We cannot rebel against God's laws that govern creation. In the physical world God's law and truth prevails.

The Lord reigns through his anointed Messiah

God rules two ways, directly and indirectly. Ordinarily, he rules indirectly, through our labor. Sometimes manna falls from heaven, but usually God feeds us by letting us work. So God rules through others – through his anointed.

God reigns through his anointed: David, David's sons, then Jesus

Psalm 2:2 says "The kings of the earth take their stand against [the Lord's] Anointed One." The term "anointed one" is Masiach Hebrew - "Messiah." An anointed one or Messiah is set apart or consecrated by God for a special task: to become a prophet, priest, or king (Exod. 28:41, 19:16). These leaders were anointed with oil, a symbol of God's Spirit and power. David, Solomon and others were anointed to rule in God's wisdom and power (1 Sam. 16:13, 1 Kgs 1:34).

People want to rule. It's a powerful urge that often goes astray. People want to rule when they should follow another ruler. That's why children disobey parents, students ignore teachers and coaches, and workers fail to follow orders. But the basic impulse is good. We are supposed to rule some part of this world.

Indeed, when people languish under oppressors and dictators, the willingness to rebel and reclaim some power can grant strength and dignity. In Unbroken Laura Hillerbrand tells the story of American POWs in Japanese camps. Many enlisted men were enslaved because the Japanese were short of workers.

³ Kidner, 1:51

As they worked, they fought back. At railroad yards and docks, they rewrote delivery addresses and changed the labels on boxcars, sending tons of goods to the wrong destinations. "They threw fistfuls of dirt into gas tanks and broke anything mechanical that passed through their hands. Forced to build engine blocks [they] crafted exteriors well enough to pass inspection, but fashioned the interiors so the engines would never run." Once POWS who were loading heavy goods onto a barge hurled the material down with such force that they sank the barge, blocking a canal. They managed to wrench the pins and bolts out of a short section of railroad track so that a freight train derailed. By these acts the soldiers risked their lives, but "they were transformative. In risking their necks to sabotage their enemy, the men [became] soldiers again." ⁴ Fighting oppression is good.

The problem: people have a sinful desire to rule without God and his anointed. Acts 4 quotes Psalm 2 and says Jesus is the anointed whom people resist. The story: One day Jesus' apostles, Peter and John, were arrested for preaching the gospel. When they were released, the church gathered to give thanks, to pray to be bold like Peter and John.

The church tried to understand what happened. They turned to Psalm 2 and prayed: Lord, "You spoke by the Holy Spirit through our father David: 'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One...' " They applied it to Jesus: "Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and Jerusalem conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed" (Acts 4:23-28).

Hebrews applies Psalm 2 to Jesus, for he most truly fulfilled it. Yes, God told David, "You are my son, today I have become your Father." He said this to David because, from the day of coronation, kings were God's "representative sons." Yes, God told David, "He shall be to me a son" (2 Sam 7:14). But Jesus is truly God's Son. Hebrews 5:5 says "God said to him, 'You are my Son, today I have become your Father.'" We think "Today God becomes Jesus' Father? He's always Jesus' Father." Yes, but hear how Romans 1 says it:

Jesus came from the seed of David according to the flesh.
He is declared powerful Son of God according to the Spirit.

When Paul says Jesus "came" it means He already existed and chose to enter this world. According to the flesh, Jesus came as the promised Son of David. But by the Spirit, Jesus "was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4). Jesus was "declared" or designated Son.

There is a heresy - "adoptionism" that says Jesus was the most faithful man, whom God recognized and adopted as his Son after he proved himself with his total obedience.

But Jesus did not become Son of God at his resurrection. He is the pre-existent Lord; after his resurrection, he was finally recognized 1:4. Until the resurrection, people viewed him as a teacher or wonder worker. Then with the resurrection, the rank Jesus always possessed as Son,

⁴ Unbroken, 242-3

Messiah, and Lord was publicly declared and recognized⁵. Came translates ginomai. It conveys descent.⁶

So the statement "You are my son; today I have become your Father" is partially true of Israel's king. It is most true of Jesus. He is truly God's Son. He was declared or designated Son with power at his resurrection. The psalms find their highest fulfillment in Jesus.

Augustine said, "Jesus himself is the Singer of the Psalms." As you read them, so how Jesus can sing them both with us and for us. Through his song, by his grace, we become sons of God, the Father.

God told David "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession" Psalm 2.8). But he truly said it to Jesus. This promise is the basis of all our missional work, whether here in St. Louis or in Kenya, Hungary or Iraq. If we ask why the church ventures great things – hospitals, schools, orphanages – this is the reason: The nations are Jesus' inheritance, the ends of the earth his possession.

Since we're united to Jesus, God says it to us. In Psalm 2:9, God tells his king, "You will rule them with an iron scepter." Revelation quotes this three times. Twice he applies it to Jesus (12:5, 19:15): He will rule the nations with an iron sceptre. He also applies it to us: We rule with an iron sceptre (2:27). It holds for Jesus, and for us. This principle has often inspired Christian social action; I hope it inspires you.

A surprising book, Guinness and God Stephen Mansfield, 2009 shows how it worked for one Christian, Arthur Guinness. The book gives a short history of beer, which was an important beverage for from 12th to 19th centuries. No one understood micro-organisms or how disease spread through contaminated water. People dumped garbage and sewage in rivers, people downstream drank and got sick. Water made people sick, so people avoided it. Instead, they drank alcoholic beverages, above all beer. Luther, Calvin, and Puritans all drank beer (pp.24-33). Monks and nuns, including Luther's wife, brewed it. Alcohol content was far lower than in our beers. If people drank in moderation, no one got drunk.

But some did drink in excess. This especially happened during the "Gin Craze" which started around 1700. Drunkenness was rampant and caused broken families, poverty and crime. Remember, water wasn't safe. Therefore some Christian brewers tried to return people beer – germ-free due to the brewing process, low in alcohol, even nutritious because of its B vitamins.

Around 1760 Arthur Guinness encountered John Wesley, the great preacher. He advocated strong and active faith in Jesus – the quest for holiness, gifts to the poor, the needy, the prisoner (pp.62-64). Wherever he went, he also preached this motto to men: "Earn all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can." Your success, your wealth is a sign that God called you to your work. Therefore, "Earn all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can." Use your wealth to aid mankind.

Guinness listened and acted. His work was profitable and he shared it with his workers in novel ways. He offered them medical care, pensions, and educational benefits. He also

⁵ Moo, Romans, 50

⁶ David Moo, 44, Cranfield, 58-9

transformed his city: he built Sunday schools, gave vast sums to the poor, joined hospital boards and challenged the materialism of his social class. All because he understood that Jesus is Savior and king

Let me add a wrinkle. The term "rule" in the New Testament literally means "shepherd." Jesus rules "shepherds" with an iron rod or scepter." Jesus is a shepherd and shepherds use their rod as a crook to separate out mixed flocks and as a club against marauders. Jesus is a king with a scepter, a shepherd with a rod – a rod of iron. That rod God's foes and our foes. And it directs us. As Psalm 1:12 says, "Blessed are all who take refuge in him."

Because Jesus has a rod of iron, the Psalm commands "You kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear... Kiss the Son" in sincere homage – "lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way" (2:9-11).

3. The Messianic king is inaugurated, then transferred and missing.

Today, King Jesus has been inaugurated. But his throne is in heaven, not Jerusalem or any city on earth. In the eyes of unbelievers, he has gone missing. It is a familiar problem. David was the king who loves God and his law and cares for the weak – according to Psalm 41. Solomon took David's place: He defended the afflicted, pitied the weak, prevented violence and ruled from sea to sea (Psalm 72:8-13).

But after Solomon, the godly king disappeared. Psalm 88 says the crown lay in the dust and the covenant seemed a thing of the past (88:8-9). Now what? Three things: Live in faith, in worship, in obedience.

Faith

We feel the problem of God's apparent absence – Lord hear my cry. The pain is sharp, but not new. Psalm 89:45 asks, "O Lord where is your former great love, which... you swore to David?"

Jesus told several parables that answer it this way: The king has gone on a journey. He entrusted his realm to "wise and faithful servants" until he returns. We must rule, as best we can, for him. What does that mean?⁷

It means we still believe and sing "Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations." You still reign, "robed in majesty... the great King above gods" 90:1, 93:1, 95:3. We don't quit, when there is some trouble, some evidence against our faith.

We live obediently, worshipfully

Even if we can't see God as well as we wish, we still sing the psalms of praise. Psalm 145:1-2: "I will exalt you, my God the King. Every day I will praise you and extol your name forever and ever" . With all my heart I plead with: Lay off complaints; that's what the raging nations do. We praise in songs, prayers, thoughts and conversations.

We obey by hearing God's instruction – last week – and by obeying in love. Psalm 119:97 says, "Oh how I love your law; I meditate on it all day long." And God promises us blessing:

⁷ Futato, Praise

"Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD" (119:1).

Blameless doesn't mean perfection. Rather, we aim for excellence without demanding excellence. Aim for excellence without demanding perfection.

We are broken achievers. Never perfect. Always a gap between intent and performance. God is perfect, we are not. God can control all variables, we cannot. Some people feel uncomfortable when they're out of control. But we're always out of control. Anything else is an illusion (of others) or delusion (of self). To be human is to be finite and the finite is never fully in control.

God is king; he is in control and we find peace when we rest in his royal control. Like men on a life raft, we do what we can in our small realm. We try to find shelter and water and then we rest. So kiss the Son, then walk according to his word, in his ways. Know that we come to the King by faith.