

Psalm 2

Introduction

Last week we saw that Psalms 1 and 2 were purposefully placed at the beginning of the Psalter to introduce the 148 psalms that follow. To our eyes, these two chapters might not appear at first to have much in common. Psalm 1 is a “wisdom psalm.” It talks about the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked, and focuses on God’s Word and Law. Psalm 2 is a “royal psalm.” It speaks of God’s Anointed King ruling from Jerusalem with sovereign authority over all. But we saw last week that in fact, these two psalms are really a single unit (see p. 8). They’re meant to be read together as an introduction to the entire book. Together, they give us the key to “unlock” the Psalms.

So how, exactly, do Psalms 1 and 2 fit together (besides just some repeated words)? We began to answer that question last week as we looked at Psalm 1. We’ll try to finish answering that question this morning as we come to Psalm 2. Part 2 of the introduction to the Psalms begins like this:

I. Psalm 2:1–3 — Why do the nations rage and the peoples murmur vanity? The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers take counsel together against Yahweh and against his Anointed, saying, “Let us burst their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!”

Psalm 1 began with this beatitude: “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, and in the way of sinners does not stand, and in the seat of scoffers does not sit; but his delight is in the law of Yahweh; and in His law he *murmurs* day and night.” Now, at the beginning of Psalm 2, we have the opposite picture being painted. Here *are* the wicked, and the sinners, and the scoffers. Here *are* the people *murmuring* not humility and thanksgiving and obedience to Yahweh’s law, but instead pride, and discontent, and rebellion. Instead of delighting in the law of the Lord, in their deepest heart of hearts they’re murmuring plans to throw off His “fetters” and cast away His “cords” from them.

For those who are still dead in their sins, the rule of God, who is the holy and righteous Lawgiver, will always be something restrictive and burdensome and oppressive—“cords” that chafe and “fetters” that imprison. The Apostle Paul says that “the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God, for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so” (Rom. 8:7). And so those who are still dead in their sins can only think of bursting these fetters and *casting* these cords away. But the one who has been raised up with Christ and who delights now in God’s law hears God saying:

➤ Hosea 11:4 — I led them with ropes of a man, with cords of love, and I became to them as one who lifts the yoke from their jaws; and I bent down and fed them.

Today, under the New Covenant, the one who murmurs God’s law day and night is the one who has received and believed these words of Jesus:

- Matthew 11:28–30 (cf. Jer. 5:5) — Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

Not so the wicked and the sinners and the scoffers. All they can think of is casting off what is for them the “oppressive” yoke of God’s authority and rule.

“The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers take counsel together against Yahweh,” says the psalmist, “*and against His Anointed.*” The way the wicked and sinners and scoffers rebel against Yahweh is by rebelling against His Anointed. Who is this Anointed? We can picture a coronation ceremony in Israel when a new king is being crowned and installed upon the throne.

At the coronation... the new king first pledged fidelity to [Yahweh’s] covenant [the law] and was then crowned... as the [rightful] ruler. Only then was he anointed with holy oil, becoming the ‘Anointed of the Lord’ (cf. 1 Sam 16:13; 1 Kings 1:39) (VanGemeren).

We read in 2 Kings 11:

- 2 Kings 11:12 — Then [Jehoiada the priest] brought the king’s son out and put the crown on him and gave him the testimony [the law]; and they made him king and anointed him, and they clapped their hands and said, “Long live the king!”

Notice that part of the coronation ceremony was giving the new king a copy of the testimony. Yahweh’s *Anointed* was himself subject to the Yahweh’s *law* and was therefore to mediate the rule of Yahweh over His people. This explains these instructions for the king in Deuteronomy:

- Deuteronomy 17:18–19 — Now it will be when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear Yahweh his God, to carefully observe all the words of this law and these statutes...

Do you see what’s going on here? Yahweh’s Anointed was to lead the people as one delighting in Yahweh’s law—as one murmuring His law day and night. He was to *be* that supremely blessed man in Psalm 1 so that He might lead the people into obedience. It’s this faithful king who is envisioned in Psalm 2, so that when the nations rebel against Him they’re rebelling against God Himself.

But most of the kings who ruled in Jerusalem were not faithful. They didn’t delight in God’s law; they didn’t murmur it day and night. During the reigns of David and Solomon, the rule of God’s Anointed went out to many of the surrounding nations. But after Solomon died, it was for the most part a story of continual decline until Jerusalem was destroyed. It was during this time that the faithful in Israel would lament in the words of Psalm 89:

- Psalm 89:38–39, 49–51 — But You have cast off and rejected, You have been full of wrath against Your Anointed. You have spurned the covenant of Your slave; You have profaned

his crown to the ground... Where are Your former lovingkindnesses, O Lord, which You swore to David in Your faithfulness? Remember, O Lord, the reproach of Your slaves; how I bear in my bosom the reproach of all the many peoples, with which Your enemies have reproached, O Yahweh, with which they have reproached the footsteps of Your Anointed.

Psalm 2 might have made sense in the days of David and Solomon, but what about when the crown of Yahweh's Anointed has been "profaned to the ground"? It was actually during this time that the psalter was given its final shape and that Psalms 1 and 2 were so carefully placed here at the beginning. The same people who "murmured" the lament in Psalm 89 never stopped murmuring Psalm 2. They never stopped talking to themselves and murmuring by faith these words: "*Why* do the nations rage and the peoples murmur vanity?" (This isn't a lament!) I imagine the Psalmist being first astonished, and then amused, and then indignant. Why do people attempt something so foolish?—Something so utterly "vain"? Are they out of their minds? Have they lost their senses? But then what about that man or woman or child who's murmuring these words when all the while the crown of Yahweh's Anointed is lying in the dust? Suddenly, the scene shifts from earth to heaven:

II. Psalm 2:4-6 — He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord mocks them. Then he speaks to them in his anger and terrifies them in his fury, saying, "But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain."

In verses 1-3 we saw the "kings of the earth" all gathered together. Now in verses 4-6 we lift our eyes to the one who "sits in the heavens." This time, instead of referring to God by His covenant name (Yahweh), the Psalmist refers to Him as Adonai. It is Adonai—the Master and sovereign Lord, the one who sits in the heavens—who mocks all the peoples and nations and kings and rulers of the earth. I'm reminded of the first words of the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray: "Our Father, *who is in heaven...*" (Mat. 6:9). This isn't just a bare statement of spatial location. It's a confession of faith. What does it mean that our Father is in heaven and that this one who is in heaven is the one we come to in prayer?

- Psalm 11:4 (cf. 33:13) — Yahweh is in His holy temple; Yahweh's throne is in heaven; *His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men.*
- Psalm 103:19 — Yahweh has established His throne in the heavens, and *His kingdom rules over all.*
- Psalm 115:3 — [O]ur God is in the heavens; *He does whatever He pleases.*
- Psalm 123:1 — *To You I lift up my eyes, the One enthroned in the heavens!*

There is a certain kind of "sad humor" in these verses. From His throne in the *heavens*, the Lord looks *down* and sees all the kings of the *earth* gathered together. I'm reminded of when God "came down" to see the tower that men were building to reach into heaven (Gen. 11:4-5). The Lord looks down from heaven and He hears all their murmuring. And from His throne in the heavens, Yahweh Adonai laughs (cf. Psalm 37:13; 59:8). And it's the sound of this laughter that immediately dispels all our fear of men and stills all our trembling. How good it is to lift our eyes from the wicked and the sinners and the scoffers on earth to the one who sits in the heavens! How good it is to "lift up our eyes" to the One enthroned in the heavens. How good it is to pray, "Our Father, who is in heaven..."

“He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord mocks them. Then he speaks to them in his anger and terrifies them in his fury, saying, ‘But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain.’” Yahweh’s answer to the nations is the coronation ceremony—the enthronement ceremony—of His Anointed. The wicked and sinners and scoffers, and all the nations of the earth can murmur and plot rebellion all they want, but the sovereign Lord who sits in the heavens has spoken. And the word that He has spoken is to be believed.

➤ Psalm 119:89 — Forever, O Yahweh, Your word stands firm in heaven.

When the crown of God’s Anointed was profaned in the dust, the faithful lifted up their eyes to heaven where Yahweh’s throne remained untouched and where His word of promise stood firm.

What does it mean that Yahweh has installed His king upon Zion? What does this mean for the nations who are murmuring rebellion? And what does this mean for God’s people who are delighting in the law of the Lord and murmuring His law day and night? After describing the scene on earth, and then the scene in heaven, now the scene shifts again to earth where we hear Yahweh’s Anointed speaking—and speaking, as it were, directly to us. So listen carefully, now, to what He says:

III. Psalm 2:7 — “I will surely tell of the decree of Yahweh: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You.’”

When the LORD’s Anointed says, “I will surely tell of the decree,” there’s no dutiful, grudging attitude here. I will *surely tell* of the decree—with joy and gladness! I will *surely tell* of the decree—with thanksgiving and praise! And who is He telling? He’s not telling God, and He’s not telling Himself. He’s telling *us*, so that we might rejoice and give thanks with and in Him. “[Yahweh] said to me, ‘You are My son; today I have begotten you.’”

When did God say this? When exactly does Yahweh “beget” His son? We have to go back now and read about the covenant God made with David:

➤ 2 Samuel 7:11–16 — Yahweh also declares to you [David] that Yahweh will make a house for you. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up one of your seed after you, who will come forth from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom... *I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me*; when he commits iniquity, I will reprove him with the rod of men and the strikes from the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not be removed from him... And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.

It was on the coronation day of each successive king in David’s line that that king was taken up into a position and relationship of royal sonship—him being a son to Yahweh and Yahweh being a father to him—and all this because of God’s everlasting covenant with David. And what does this sonship mean? It means that the king’s calling is not to rule independently of God, but to mediate the rule of Yahweh over His people and even over all the earth (cf. Gen. 1:27-28). This is why Yahweh’s son was to write for himself a copy of Yahweh’s law and keep it with him and read from it all the days of his life. He was to delight in this law and murmur it day and night so

that he might lead the people into obedience and into all the blessings that would flow from this obedience (Psalm 1). But what about the wicked and the sinners and the scoffers who murmur vanity?—Who say of Yahweh and of His Anointed, “Let us burst their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us”?

IV. Psalm 2:7-9 — “I will surely tell of the decree of Yahweh: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth as Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like a potter’s vessel.’”

The overarching message of the psalter is the supreme happiness of obedience to God’s law (Ps. 1) in light of the absolute certainty of His sovereign rule and kingship over all the earth—a rule that He will manifest through a righteous King who will lead His people into obedience and who will destroy all His and their enemies. We’re reminded, here, of the closing words of Psalm 1: “[The wicked] are like chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For Yahweh knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” How is it that we know the way of the wicked will perish (Psalm 1)? We know this because of the decree that God has made concerning His Son and because of the prayer that He has called His Son to pray (Psalm 2).

We’ve heard the nations’ murmuring (“Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!; v. 3), we’ve heard Yahweh’s speech (“But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain”; v. 6), and we’ve heard the Lord’s Anointed telling of Yahweh’s decree (“I will surely tell of the decree of Yahweh: He said to me...”; vv. 7-9), but now we remember that these speeches are all part of the murmurings of God’s people. It was as God’s people murmured these words that their faith was strengthened and that they were enabled first (at the beginning of Psalm 2) to ask themselves, “Why do the nations rage and the peoples murmur *vanity*?” and then (at the end of Psalm 2), to address directly all the kings and judges of the earth:

V. Psalm 2:10-12a — So now, O kings, show insight; take warning, O judges of the earth. Serve Yahweh with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son [do homage to the Son], lest He become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled.

Even in the Old Testament, when the crown of Yahweh’s Anointed was lying profaned on the ground, we see the transforming power of faith in the word that God has spoken (cf. Ps. 89:30-37). One day the wrath of this coming righteous king will be kindled, and the wicked, and the sinners, and the scoffers will all perish in the way (cf. “the way of the wicked will perish”; 1:6). “How blessed,” then, “how supremely happy is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, and in the way of sinners does not stand, and in the seat of scoffers does not sit!” One day, the coming righteous king will say to Yahweh:

➤ Psalm 40:6-8 (cf. Heb. 10:4-10) — Sacrifice and meal offering You have not desired; My ears You have opened [to hear and obey Your law]; burnt offering and sin offering You have not required. Then I said, “Behold, *I* come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I desire to do Your will, O my God; Your law is within my inner being.”

And in turn, Yahweh will say to this coming righteous king:

- Psalm 45:6–7 (cf. Heb. 1:8-9) — Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of joy above Your companions.

This is the king who then leads all of God’s people into that supreme happiness of obedience to God’s law—so that they’re all like that tree planted by channels of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither (Ps. 1:3).

If the Old Testament saints murmured these words by faith when the crown of Yahweh’s Anointed was still lying profaned in the dust, how much more should we be able to murmur these words by faith who see Jesus, Yahweh’s King, even now installed upon Zion, His holy mountain (cf. Acts 4:24-30)? Paul said in one of his sermons:

- Acts 13:32–33 — “And we proclaim to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, 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.’”

The author of Hebrews writes:

- Hebrews 1:3–5 (cf. 5:5) — [H]aving accomplished cleansing for sins, [Jesus] sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say, “YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU”? And again, “I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME”?

Do we think Jesus will fail to ask for the nations as His inheritance, and the ends of the earth as His possession? And do we think His Father will fail to give these to Him? Do we think Jesus will fail to break all the wicked and sinners and scoffers with a rod of iron, and shatter those who murmur vanity like a potter’s vessel? Jesus says of the one who faces persecution and suffering and even martyrdom:

- Revelation 2:27 — AND HE SHALL RULE [THE NATIONS] WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father...
- Revelation 19:15 (cf. Rev. 12:5) — From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may STRIKE DOWN THE NATIONS, and He will RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON; and HE TREADS THE WINE PRESS OF THE FURY [*orge*] OF THE ANGER [*thymos*] OF GOD, the Almighty [cf. “Then He speaks to them in His anger (*thymos*) and terrifies them in His fury (*orge*)”].

If the Old Testament saints murmured these words by faith when the crown of Yahweh's Anointed was still lying profaned in the dust, how much more should we be able to murmur these words by faith who see Jesus now installed upon Zion, Yahweh's holy mountain? How much more should we be those who do not walk in the counsel of the wicked, and in the way of sinners do not stand, and in the seat of scoffers do not sit? How much more should we be those who delight in the law of Yahweh and who murmur His law day and night? He kept the whole law for us; He suffered the whole curse of the law in our place; in His death, we died to sin; by His life, we live to righteousness (Rom. 6:1-14); and now as our King (to borrow from our Confession) He is daily subduing us to Himself, drawing us, upholding us, delivering us, and preserving us to His heavenly kingdom (cf. LCF 8.10 and Baptist Catechism Q.29). And so with all our hearts, we agree with the psalmist when he concludes, echoing the beatitude that we started with in Psalm 1:

VI. Psalm 2:12b — How blessed [how supremely happy] are all who take refuge in Him.

Let me ask one more time: If the Old Testament believer could speak these words by faith when the crown of Yahweh's Anointed was still lying profaned in the dust, how much more should we be able to say these words who see Jesus now installed upon Zion, Yahweh's holy mountain?

How blessed are all who do not seek to tear His fetters apart or cast away His cords from them. How blessed are all who trust Him and who are being daily led by Him into the way of obedience. How blessed indeed—how supremely happy—are all who take refuge in Him.

Psalms 1-2
Introducing the Psalter

HOW BLESSED is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, and in the way of sinners does not stand, and in the seat of scoffers does not sit.

But his delight is in the law of Yahweh; and in His law he **MURMURS** day and night. He will be like a tree planted by channels of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.

Not so the wicked! Rather, they are like chaff that the wind drives away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For Yahweh knows the way of the righteous, but the **WAY** of the wicked will **PERISH**.

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Why do the nations rage and the peoples **MURMUR** vanity? The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers take counsel together against Yahweh and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!"

He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord mocks them. Then he speaks to them in his anger and terrifies them in his fury, saying, "But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain."

I will surely tell of the decree of Yahweh: He said to me, "You are My Son, today I have begotten you. Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as your inheritance, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, you shall shatter them like a potter's vessel."

So now, O kings, show insight; take warning, O judges of the earth. Serve Yahweh with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he become angry, and you **PERISH** in the **WAY**, for his wrath may soon be kindled.

HOW BLESSED are all who take refuge in him.