

Foothills Christian Assembly Sermon July 10, 2022

Acts 4:23 – 31 – “Psalm 2: Understanding and Responding to Persecution”

13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. 14 And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. 15 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, 16 saying, "What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. 17 "But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name." 18 So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. 20 "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." 21 So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done. 22 For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.

23 And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. 24 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, 25 "who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: 'Why did the nations rage, And the people plot vain things? 26 The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the LORD and against His Christ.' 27 "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 28 "to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. 29 "Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, 30 "by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

32 Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. 33 And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. 34 Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. 36 And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, 37 having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

I. Introduction

- a. What is your relationship with fear, threatenings and persecution? What points of leverage does this world have over you, so that you are not bold in all situations? What attacks, or threatened attacks, can silence you?
- b. Have you ever taken the time to ponder Psalm 2 in preparation for persecution? The people of God in Acts did. In this text, we see how we must be informed of the principles of Psalm 2 in order to be prepared to deal with the hellish ragings we will surely face as we walk on in Christ, under His reign, carrying out His Kingdom's work.
- c. Today's Sermon: Acts 4:23-31 - "Psalm 2: Understanding and Responding to Persecution"
 - i. Brief overview of this Passage
 - ii. Psalm 2
 1. The General Question from David v1-3
 2. The Father's Response: Derision, Wrath, Enthrones His King v4-6
 3. The Enthroned Son-King Reports the Father's Commission v7-9
 4. David Exhorts and Warns the kings of the earth v10-12a
 5. David Encourages all those who Trust the Son-King v12b
 - iii. Principles from Psalm 2 for Right Understanding of Persecution
 - iv. Principles from Psalm 2 for Right Response to Persecution

II. Brief overview of this passage

- a. Setting v23a
 - i. 23 And being let go, they went to their own companions
 1. So, Peter and John have been commanded by the Sanhedrin to stop spreading the Gospel, or face severe punishments. Their first response is to go back to their own people, the true Church, the believers at that time, in Jerusalem. Peter and John do not lay aside their calling and go home to Galilee.
- b. Persecution Report from Peter and John v23b
 - i. and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.
 1. Peter and John tell their brothers and sisters every command and threat of the Sanhedrin. Peter and John do not withhold any of the terrible threats. They are all sharing these persecution threats together.
- c. Prayer: The First Response of God's people v24-30
 - i. 24 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, 25 "who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: 'Why did the nations rage, And the people plot vain things? 26 The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the LORD and against His Christ.' 27 "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 28 "to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined

before to be done. 29 "Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, 30 "by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus."

- d. Prayer: Lifted Voices to God with One Accord v24a
 - i. 24 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said:
 - 1. The first response of the people of God was to lift up their voices to God. They didn't form a council or a study committee. They prayed.
 - 2. They are all with one accord. They are in agreement together on the key truths of the situation: Jesus Christ is their Messiah Who was crucified and resurrected from the dead, ascended and enthroned, and He has commanded them to preach repentance and remission of sins in Jesus' Name to the whole world. And, they know He hears their prayers and will protect and provide for His Church to do His will, against all enemies.
- e. Prayer: Appeal to God as Creator v24b
 - i. "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them,
 - 1. They begin their prayer by returning to Genesis 1, proclaiming the invincible might of God.
- f. Prayer: Scripture (Psalm 2) as Foundation for Prayer v25,26
 - i. 25 "who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: 'Why did the nations rage, And the people plot vain things? 26 The kings of the earth took their stand, And the rulers were gathered together Against the LORD and against His Christ.'
 - 1. They quote this Scripture from Psalm 2:1,2 as the basis for their understanding of their current situation. By doing so, they are also showing forth their understanding and reliance upon all the principles associated with this Psalm that goes on to answer the question posed by David in v1,2 of Psalm 2.
- g. Prayer: Expressing the Persecution to God, based upon Scripture v27
 - i. 27 "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
 - 1. Their prayer goes on to define the fulfillment of Psalm 2 in the futile attempts of Herod, Pilate, the Romans and the Jews to destroy the Messiah and His Kingdom. The crucifixion of Jesus is the fulfillment of Psalm 2:1-3.
- h. Prayer: Trust in God's Sovereign wisdom, love and power v28
 - i. 28 "to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.

1. Their prayer goes on to express their trust in God's perfect sovereignty over all things, even over the diabolical murder of Jesus their Messiah. They are filled with trust in God's love and power and wisdom.
- i. Prayer: Acknowledging the threats, and our temptations to fear v29a
 - i. 29 "Now, Lord, look on their threats,
 1. Their prayer asks God to look with them on the severe threats. Their prayer here acknowledges that these threats are strong enough to terrify them into cowardly retreat and silence.
- j. Prayer: Supplication – Boldness from God to overcome fear v29
 - i. and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word,
 1. A simple request based upon their humble acknowledgement of need. The threats are indeed terrible. They know the terror is meant to silence them. So, they ask God for boldness to continue to speak His Word.
- k. Prayer: Supplication – Healing, Signs and Wonders v30
 - i. 30 "by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus."
 1. They have seen the wondrous combination of miracles and God's Word preached. They ask God to continue to stretch out His hand from heaven unto more healings, signs and wonders in Jesus' Name. They glorify Christ as God's Holy Servant.
- l. The Lord's immediate reply: Shaking, Filling, Boldness v31
 - i. 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.
 1. From His throne of Grace, the Lord grants His children help in their time of need. His help comes "when they had prayed." God shakes the place. God fills them with His Holy Spirit, and His children are blessed with their request. They are given what they desire, the ability to continue in their mission, the courage to resist fear and speak God's Word in the face of even these terrible threats.

III. Psalm 2

- a. "We have here a very great struggle about the kingdom of Christ, hell and heaven contesting it; the seat of the war is this earth, where Satan has long had a usurped kingdom and exercised dominion to such a degree that he has been called *the prince of the power of the very air* we breathe in and *the god of the world* we live in. He knows very well that, as the Messiah's kingdom rises and

gets ground, his falls and loses ground; and therefore, though it will be set up certainly, it shall not be set up tamely.”¹

- b. The General Question from David v1-3
 - i. Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? 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 break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us."
 1. David lays out his rhetorical question as a statement of the foolishness of all those who resist the Lord and His Anointed. Their international scheming against God, against Christ, is utter vanity, even so futile that their ragings will be used by God to accomplish His great purposes and will by no means thwart or damage His plan.
 2. David states clearly that the raging, unbelieving kings and rulers of the earth 1) have set themselves against the Lord and His Christ and 2) have taken counsel together, schemed together against the Lord and His Christ.
 - a. “It is a combined and confederate opposition. They *take counsel together*, to assist and animate one another in this opposition; they carry their resolutions *nemine contradicente—unanimously*, that they will push on the unholy war against the Messiah with the utmost vigour: and thereupon councils are called, cabals are formed, and all their wits are at work to find out ways and means for the preventing of the establishment of Christ’s kingdom”²
 3. David states the plan of this foolish international conspiracy:
 - a. To break God’s bonds in pieces
 - b. To cast God’s cords away from their eyes
 - c. “*Let us break their bands asunder*. They will not be under any government; they are children of Belial, that cannot endure the yoke, at least the yoke of the Lord and his anointed. They will be content to entertain such notions of the kingdom of God and the Messiah as will serve them to dispute of and to support their own dominion with: if the Lord and his anointed will make them rich and great in the world, they will bid them welcome; but if they will restrain their corrupt appetites and passions, regulate and reform their hearts and lives, and bring them under the government of a pure and heavenly religion, truly then

¹ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 744.

² Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 745.

*they will not have this man to reign over them, Lu. 19:14. Christ has bands and cords for us; those that will be saved by him must be ruled by him; but they are cords of a man, agreeable to right reason, and bands of love, conducive to our true interest: and yet against those the quarrel is. Why do men oppose religion but because they are impatient of its restraints and obligations? They would break asunder the bands of conscience they are under and the cords of God's commandments by which they are called to tie themselves out from all sin and to themselves up to all duty; they will not receive them, but cast them away as far from them as they can."*³

c. The Father's Response: Derision, Wrath, Enthrones His King v4-6

- i. He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. 5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure: 6 "Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion."
- ii. He Who sits in the heavens is not threatened by all the kings and rulers of all the ages of this world. The threats of hell and hell's men cannot touch Mount Zion.
 1. "He is in the heaven, a place of such a vast prospect that he can oversee them all and all their projects; and such is his power that he can overcome them all and all their attempts. He sits there, as one easy and at rest, out of the reach of all their impotent menaces and attempts. There he sits as Judge in all the affairs of the children of men, perfectly secure of the full accomplishment of all his own purposes and designs, in spite of all opposition, Ps. 29:10. The perfect repose of the Eternal Mind may be our comfort under all the disquietments of our mind. We are tossed on earth, and in the sea, but he sits in the heavens, where he has prepared his throne for judgment"⁴
- iii. Derisive laughter: The Lord in Heaven laughs at the ridiculous and impotent ragings of hell and hell's men. Heaven's perspective sees properly that all of these deceived and angry leaders are smaller than grasshoppers, less than a speck of sand, passing like vapors, soon soon to be bound up and cast aside, forgotten.
 1. "The attempts of Christ's enemies are easily ridiculed. God *laughs* at them as a company of fools. He *has them*, and all their attempts, *in derision*, and therefore *the virgin, the daughter of Zion, has despised them*, Isa. 37:22. Sinners' follies are the just

³ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 745.

⁴ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 745.

sport of God's infinite wisdom and power; and those attempts of the kingdom of Satan which in our eyes are formidable in his are despicable. Sometimes God is said to *awake*, and *arise*, and *stir up himself*, for the vanquishing of his enemies; here is said to *sit still* and vanquish them; for the utmost operations of God's omnipotence create no difficulty at all, nor the least disturbance to his eternal rest."⁵

- iv. Wrathful Speech: The Lord in Heaven speaks via His actions. His deep displeasure with all those who hate His Son and His Son's Kingdom will be brought into the distress and terror of Christ as King of the cosmos. The One they put on the cross on the hill of Golgotha, the Father has made His very Own King on the great Throne of Mount Zion in heaven. These impotent fools put Jesus in a grave. He Who sits in heaven stretched out His hand and raised Jesus up to invincible life and crowned Him as King over all the earth. They could only for hours and days place Christ on a cross and in a grave, but the Father has set Christ His Son, His King, on heaven's throne forever, unshakable, reigning in settled peace.
 1. "The Lord Jesus is exalted to the right hand of the Father, has all power both in heaven and in earth, and is head over all things to the church, notwithstanding the restless endeavours of his enemies to hinder his advancement."⁶
- d. The Enthroned Son-King Reports the Father's Commission v7-9
 - i. "I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. 8 Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.' "
 - ii. The counsels of foolish earthlings fade, but the decrees of heaven are from everlasting to everlasting. Christ here first points to the eternal decrees of heaven as the foundation of His throne.
 1. "The kingdom of the Messiah is founded upon a decree, an eternal decree, of God the Father. It was not a sudden resolve, it was not the trial of an experiment, but the result of the counsels of the divine wisdom and the determinations of the divine will, before all worlds"⁷
 - iii. The Father spoke these words to the Son, and the Son-King reports them to us via David the Prophet.

⁵ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 745.

⁶ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 745.

⁷ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 745.

- iv. "You are My son, Today I have begotten You." – this is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.
 - 1. Act 13:28-33 "And though they found no cause for death in Him, they asked Pilate that He should be put to death. 29 "Now when they had fulfilled all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the tree and laid Him in a tomb. 30 "But God raised Him from the dead. 31 "He was seen for many days by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses to the people. 32 "And we declare to you glad tidings--that promise which was made to the fathers. 33 "God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.'"
- v. "Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession."
 - 1. The Father invites His resurrected Son to ask for all the nations of the earth as His inheritance, and to ask for all the ends of the earth for His possession.
 - 2. Jesus must have asked the Father because listen to Christ's words in Matthew 28:18-20, the Great Commission:
 - a. "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."
 - 3. All authority in heaven AND on earth. On earth = the Father has given the nations and the ends of the earth to Christ His Son-King.
 - 4. Christ's Kingdom includes all the nations and all the earth, here and now. He is the reigning King of all.
- vi. "You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.' "
 - 1. All those kings and rulers who persist in their vain, hellish ragings against Christ their true King will face not His tender arm of blessings, but rather His crushing rod of wrath, breaking them and dashing them to pieces.
 - 2. We saw this first in Christ's destruction of apostate Judaism via the Roman power, then extended to the expansion of Christianity thus far in the world.
 - a. "This was in part fulfilled when the nation of the Jews, those that persisted in unbelief and enmity to Christ's gospel, were destroyed by the Roman power, which was represented (Dan. 2:40) by feet of iron, as here by a rod of

iron. It had a further accomplishment in the destruction of the Pagan powers, when the Christian religion came to be established; but it will not be completely fulfilled till all opposing rule, principality, and power, shall be finally put down”⁸

3. It will be a victorious kingdom because of His limitless jurisdiction and power.
 - a. “Observe, How powerful Christ is and how weak the enemies of his kingdom are before him; he has a rod of iron wherewith to crush those that will not submit to his golden sceptre; they are but like a potter’s vessel before him, suddenly, easily, and irreparably dashed in pieces by him; see Rev. 2:27. “Thou shalt do it, that is, thou shalt have *leave* to do it.” Nations shall be ruined, rather than the gospel church shall not be built and established. *I have loved thee, therefore will I give men for thee*, Isa. 43:4. “Thou shalt have power to do it; none shall be able to stand before thee; and thou shalt do it effectually.” Those that will not bow shall break.”⁹
 - e. David Exhorts and Warns the kings of the earth v10-12a
 - i. Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges 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, When His wrath is kindled but a little.
 1. There is only one sane course in the face of such a matchless King. David lays out the path of escape for the vain kings and rulers. The mercy of the Son-King is on display. Rather than immediately destroy them with His rod of wrath, He gives them time to repent.
 2. The path of their return to the King: Exhortations
 - a. Wisdom to see the folly of their rebellion
 - b. Humility to be instructed by His law instead of rejecting His Kingdom
 - c. Reverent worship of their King, instead of hating Him
 - d. Rejoicing under His reign, instead of foolish anger
 - e. Demonstrated love and allegiance: Kiss the Son
 3. Warning if they don’t return to their true King
 - a. His anger will come forth and destroy them. The rod of His wrath will not forever be held docile in His right hand of might, for those who go on in their rebellion toward Him.

⁸ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 746.

⁹ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 746.

- b. “The Father is angry already; the Son is the Mediator that undertakes to make peace; if we slight him, the *Father’s wrath abides upon us* (Jn. 3:36), and not only so, but there is an addition of the Son’s wrath too, to whom nothing is more displeasing than to have the offers of his grace slighted and the designs of it frustrated. The Son can be angry, though a Lamb; he is the lion of the tribe of Judah, and the wrath of this king, this King of kings, will be as the roaring of a lion, and will drive even mighty men and chief captains to seek in vain for shelter in rocks and mountains, Rev. 6:16. If the Son be angry, who shall intercede for us? There remains no more sacrifice, no other name by which we can be saved. Unbelief is a sin against the remedy.”¹⁰
 - f. David Encourages all those who Trust the Son-King v12b
 - i. “Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.”
 - ii. The rebellious rulers and kings and judges of the earth are further encouraged to repent by the great promise of blessedness under His reign.
 - iii. In addition, this great promise is held out for all those who trust in Jesus Christ, the great Son-King on the throne of Mount Zion.
 - iv. “Those that trust in him, and so kiss him, are truly happy; but they will especially appear to be so when the wrath of Christ is kindled against others. Blessed will those be in the day of wrath, who, by trusting in Christ, have made him their refuge and patron; when the hearts of others fail them for fear they shall lift up their heads with joy; and then those who now despise Christ and his followers will be forced to say, to their own greater confusion, “Now we see that *blessed are all those, and those only, that trust in him.*” In singing this, and praying it over, we should have our hearts filled with a holy awe of God, but at the same time borne up with a cheerful confidence in Christ, in whose mediation we may comfort and encourage ourselves and one another.”¹¹
- IV. Questions to know, love and obey God

¹⁰ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 746.

¹¹ Matthew Henry, [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*](#) (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 746–747.