

“Kiss the Son”

A Sermon on Psalm 2

Texts: Psalm 2; Acts 13:13-39

I am amazed at the level of interest by Americans with the doings of the British Royals. There is something about a royal wedding or the coronation of a king or queen which fascinates us. While our founding fathers didn't think too highly of King George III, contemporary Americans absolutely loved Lady Di and Kate Middleton. And given the age of the current queen, many of us will live to see the next in-line (Charles or William) take the throne as king of the United Kingdom. No doubt, this coronation will be watched and talked about by many of us. But in the historical background of all modern coronations of European and western royalty we find Psalm 2, which was written for the coronation of a Davidic king, and which set the pattern for the coronation of the kings and queens of Christendom ever since. The second Psalm is quoted throughout the New Testament as a prophetic reference to a messianic king (Jesus Christ) whose kingdom conquers all, and who will bring about universal peace in the midst of the turmoil and upheaval of the nations. It is Charles Spurgeon who exhorts us “let us read [Psalm 2] with the eyes of faith, beholding . . . the final triumph of our Lord Jesus Christ over all his enemies.”¹

As we continue our series on select Psalms, we take up a study of the second Psalm, which is often classified as a royal Psalm because this Psalm concerns the anointing and coronation of a Davidic king—that is, someone in the line of David. Because it is a royal Psalm, it is also a messianic Psalm. As we work our way through this Psalm, I would like to accomplish three things. First, we will spend some time on the historical background of the Psalm. Second, we will then work through the Psalm and its specific contents. Finally, as we go through the Psalm we will consider how it is cited throughout the New Testament, especially in reference to the preaching of the apostles, who quote this Psalm on several occasions in reference to the person and work of Jesus Christ, Israel's Messiah.

We begin with the historical background of this Psalm which is found in the first book of the Psalter (Psalms 1-41), and which is considered by many to be a summary or an introduction to the balance of the Psalter (along with Psalm 1). The question of authorship of this Psalm is interesting because in the New Testament the authorship of this Psalm is specifically attributed to David (Acts 4:25). Yet, at least one verse in the Psalm (v. 3) speaks of a time of mutiny among the nations, a factor not present during the reign of David. Because of this time of distress, scholars have had a hard time agreeing about whether David composed this Psalm, or if it was written later for the coronation of a Davidic king as depicted in a passage such as 2 Kings 11:12, where we read of coronation of Joash, “*then he brought out the king's son and put the crown on him and gave him the testimony. And they proclaimed him king and anointed him, and they clapped their hands and said, 'Long live the king!'*” The resolution to this dilemma may be as simple as realizing the fact that this Psalm might have been composed by David and used by successive generations of Davidic kings during their own coronations.²

¹ Charles H. Spurgeon, The Treasury of David: Volume 1 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, ND), 10.

² Geoffrey W. Grogan, Psalms (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 44.

That said, the key to understanding this Psalm and its contents is two-fold. The first key is the theological context for any royal/messianic Psalm, and that is the prophecy of Nathan found in 2 Samuel 7:5-16, when Nathan tells David that the king's royal office and his biological descendants are necessarily tied to God's gracious covenant. This ties David directly to Israel's future Messiah. To properly understand Psalm 2, it is vital that we read Nathan's prophecy to David in its entirety. *"Thus says the Lord: Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?' Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, '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. 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. 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, 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. 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. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 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, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.'"* Given the messianic content of Psalm 2, this Psalm is tied to the building of God's temple in Jerusalem (by Solomon), and to that gracious covenant God made to David.

The second key to understanding this Psalm is to realize that the Psalm points beyond David (and Solomon—his son) and the coronation of any future Davidic king in Israel, to someone much greater, someone in whom both the covenant threats and the covenant curses find their ultimate fulfillment.³ Because the act of enthronement is not really Israel's doing (but ultimately is God's doing),⁴ the Psalm points ahead to someone enthroned by God who will establish an everlasting kingdom, and then finally dispense the blessings and curses of the covenant. There is only one person to whom this applies, and that is our Lord Jesus Christ. Not one of Israel's Davidic kings (including Solomon) fills the bill.

As we proceed to take up the text of the Psalm, we begin by noting that the Psalm has four sections, each with three verses. The first section includes verses 1-3 and speaks of the rebellious nations and their rulers. The second section (vv. 4-6) speaks of God's heavenly rule. The third section (vv. 7-9) speaks of God's decree. The fourth (and concluding section) speaks of Messiah's rule over all the nations (vv. 10-12).⁵ The Psalm opens with a depiction of the turmoil and upheaval among the nations, and ends with God's blessing being poured out upon his people. The critical point is that Psalm 2 depicts God's rule

³ Kidner, Psalms 1-72, 49-50.

⁴ Geoffrey W. Grogan, Psalms (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 44.

⁵ William A. VanGemeren, Psalms, Vol. 5, The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 89-91.

extending to the ends of the earth, and so when all is said and done, everything and everyone will be in submission to YHWH's Messiah. The messianic age will be one in which the Messiah will subdue all of God's enemies. Yet, there will be rebellion throughout the time of his reign (the inter-advental period is described as the great tribulation in the New Testament), but the Messiah conquers before the end. To put it as simply as possible—God wins in the end because he rules over all things, people, and nations.

The first section of the Psalm (vv. 1-3) opens with an ironic question. "*Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?*" The Psalmist seems somewhat surprised that the nations would be so foolish as to rebel against the Lord and his anointed one (the Messiah). Yet they do. Sinful people hate the holy God, and would much rather do what is right in their own eyes than obey God's will. In verse 2, the Psalmist spells out how this rebellion takes the form of a conspiracy against God on the part of the nations. "*The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed.*" The nations and their rulers plot against the Lord, and his anointed one (the coming Messiah). In fact, one of the main themes in the Book of Revelation (i.e., Revelation 13) is that the dragon (Satan) organizes the nations (the Roman empire) against the people of God (Christ's church).

In Psalm 2, the rebellion of the nations begins with murmuring, but eventually culminates with the open rebellion described in verse 3. "*Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.*" Bonds and cords refer to the way in which carts were tied to the draft animals which pulled them. The image is that of a draft animal (ox or donkey) violently shaking off the yoke which was used to direct and control it (think of any number of events in a rodeo). This image given us by the Psalmist is an illustration the kings of the earth, who act like wild animals and attempt to throw off their bonds and cords which direct them, when they rebel against YHWH and his anointed one. Seeking to throw off God's rule over them is a foolish act which ultimately they cannot successfully accomplish.⁶

Remarkably, in the Book of Acts, Luke recounts that the apostles quote from this section of the second Psalm and apply it to Pilate and Herod who put Jesus to death on the cross—the ultimate act of rebellion by the Gentile nations and rulers against YHWH and his Messiah. According to Acts 4:23-28, "*when [Peter and John] were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, 'Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, 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? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed.'*" Yet, it was the same cross which God foreordained as the means by which he would save us from our sins. The irony is inescapable. Sinful men and women wage war on God and kill his Messiah, while God uses this act of rebellion to save his people from their sins.

While the nations plot and rage against him, YHWH is not impressed. In the second section of the Psalm (vv. 4-6, in which the scene shifts to heaven), we read in verse 4, that "*he who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.*" Consider carefully what the Psalmist is saying. The Lord derides those who scheme and plot against him. In fact, he laughs at them, using the wrath of men against him (specifically the actions of Herod and Pilate) as the very means of defeating Satan and saving those whom God has chosen to save. This same theme of the rulers thinking themselves wise and mocking God is found in the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians, when Paul describes how God mocks the so-called wisdom of the philosophers who think that Christianity is only so much foolishness. The rulers

⁶ VanGemeren, Psalms, Vol. 5, 92.

and kings may plot against him, but God uses own their schemes against them, and according to the Psalmist, this rebellion against the creator provokes his wrath.

Thus in verse 5, we read the very frightening words, “*then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury.*” While the thought of God’s wrath and fury makes us nervous (and it should—the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom) our contemporaries find the possibility of the wrath and anger of God completely offensive, given the “god” of their own imagination who only has one attribute (love), and who exists primarily to affirm them in their sin, or (like a genie) grant them all their requests.

But the God who is enthroned in heaven, mocks the rulers and kings of the earth, storing up his anger against them. The God who reveals himself to us in the Bible is surely a God of love and forgiveness. The cross is proof of this. But he is also a God, who, because he is holy, hates sin, and is too holy to even look upon it. One day, all those who mock God and his ways and who refuse to do his will, will find themselves on the receiving end of his fury. The image in Revelation 6:15-17 associated with the final seal judgment comes to mind. “*Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?’*” God is in his heaven, mocking the rulers of the earth who plot against him, his fury one day to be revealed. The ruler and kings of the earth who fight against him will face the wrath of the Lamb.

The one through whom God’s wrath and fury will be poured out is revealed in verse 6. “*As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.*” While the kings and rulers scheme, YHWH establishes *his* king on his holy mountain (Zion). On one level—the historical context when this Psalm was written—this refers to God fulfilling the prophecy of Nathan to David through the establishment of a line of Davidic kings who rule over Israel from Mount Zion (in Jerusalem). The Israelites knew that YHWH’s rule was not limited to a local mountain in Jerusalem, because they knew that YHWH had created all things. Yet, because of its religious significance and importance to Israel, Zion was considered YHWH’s holy dwelling place. Zion is spoken of elsewhere as YHWH’s “footstool” (cf. Psalm 99:5)⁷ From Zion YHWH ruled the nations through the king he has installed and enthroned. Through this king and his descendants God will fulfill his covenant promise, “*I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.*”

Yet, on another level, it is from the biological line of David that Jesus will trace his own ancestry. As Paul reminds us in the opening verses of Romans, “*Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.*” The coming of Jesus ultimately fulfills God’s promise of an everlasting kingdom established by someone in David’s royal lineage. God’s decree both establishes a Davidic throne in Israel, and ensures the coming of his anointed one, Jesus Christ, a descendant of David.

In verses 7-9, the author now takes up the theme of God’s decree as the anointed one himself speaks. “*I will tell of the decree: ‘The Lord said to me, You are my Son; today I have begotten you.’*” This decree is certainly tied to God’s covenant promise in 2 Samuel 7:14—“*I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.*” In the Psalm’s original context, this may have been an oracle from God through a prophet, or a

⁷ VanGemeren, Psalms, Vol. 5, 94.

word which the king pronounces upon his son at the son's coronation. But as we see in the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus, God the Father himself declares that Jesus is both **His** son and **His** servant (citing from this Psalm and from Isaiah 42:1). In Matthew 3:21, we are told of "*a voice from heaven [which] said, 'this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.'*"⁸ The same identification of Jesus as the Father's beloved son can be found in the writings of Paul (i.e., Romans 1:4), or in the sermons of the apostles (as in Acts 13:33, part of our New Testament lesson), where it is the resurrection of Jesus which constitutes him as that one spoken of in Nathan's prophecy in 2 Samuel 7, and in the decree (prophecy) regarding the coming of the Messiah in Psalm 2:7. The author of Hebrews likewise applies this verse directly to Jesus: "*For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you'? Or again, 'I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son?'*"

In light of this New Testament's repeated appeal to this Psalm, it is important to take note of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances when he emphasizes to his disciples that the gospel must go out to the nations and the ends of the earth.⁹ That one who is declared the Son of God by the Father in fulfillment of this Psalm also affirms the promise of Psalm 2:8. "*Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.*" Once raised from the dead, Jesus establishes the missionary enterprise exactly as foretold in this Psalm. As the king appointed, coronated, and enthroned by God, the Son of God asks that his kingdom be extended to the ends of the earth—a prayer which is granted by the father, who states in verse 9, "*you shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.*" Three times this section of the second Psalm (verses 8-9) are cited in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 2:26-27; 6:10; 19:15). This messianic promise gives Christians hope that in even the midst of persecution (from false teachers within the church, and persecutors outside), Jesus will conquer his enemies and extend his kingdom to the ends of the earth—through the missionary enterprise which the dragon and the beast oppose with everything in them. Yet, Jesus wins in the end. His people will be vindicated because Jesus is vindicated. He will break his enemies and smash them into pieces.

In the fourth and final section of Psalm 2, verses 10-12, the rebel nations of the earth are pointedly warned that the only option available to them is to submit to YHWH and his Messiah. This warning is framed not as an invitation, but as an ultimatum.¹⁰ "*Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers 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, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*" It now becomes clear that the Messiah's rule will be consummated at some point off in the distant future, when his universal rule extends to the ends of the earth. Those kings who are wise will submit to God's Messiah. Those who are not are warned. The consequences of their rebellion against him will be great.

The kings of the earth must serve the Lord because they are his vassals (servants). The kings and rulers must rejoice in the fact of God's rule over them, and yet in the same time, they must do so with trembling—an awareness that it is God who in his providence raises up these kings and establishes them upon their thrones. The obvious implication is that same God who raised them up, can also bring them down by ending their rule. Therefore, they must "kiss" the son (the messianic king), "a kiss" being a sign of submission to the king's authority, as well as a demonstration of the subject's sincerity and affection.

⁸ Kidner, Psalms 1-72, 51.

⁹ Kidner, Psalms 1-72, 51.

¹⁰ Kidner, Psalms 1-72, 52.

That is warning is to be taken seriously can be seen in the fact that the Son's wrath can flare up instantaneously. We should not take this warning as though God were somehow capricious or has a short temper, as do sinful humans. Rather, God is holy. Throughout the Old Testament, God is said to be long-suffering and patient with his people. But we also read that God brings judgment upon those who oppose his Christ (his anointed son, the Messiah) and who resist his kingdom. The kings and rulers of the earth must not let their temporal power, wealth, and authority in the civil kingdom blind them to the fact that the only reason they rule over anything is because God has ordained it. The kings and rulers of the earth are the servants of a sovereign God. They rule in the civil kingdom solely at God's good pleasure. And they must never forget it.

The second Psalm ends with the same kind of blessing we mentioned throughout the first Psalm. *Blessed are all who take refuge in him.* Notice the closing words of the Psalm. There is no refuge *from* the anointed king, there is refuge only *in* the king.¹¹ Those who rejoice with trembling and kiss the Son through faith in God's Messiah will be spared. Those who submit to the will of God and acknowledge that God has installed his king (Jesus) on his holy mount (Zion) need not fear that God's wrath will flare up against us. Why? Because God's wrath has already flared up—but his wrath was not directed against us, but against his own son, Jesus Christ, the all conquering king who died for our sins and was raised for our justification.

As we conclude, what then do we take with us from this Psalm?
 As a royal Psalm speaking of the coronation of a Davidic king, no doubt Psalm 2 figured prominently in the coronations of the kings of Israel (likely including David and Solomon). At the same time, the Psalm points ahead to the messianic age, and more specifically to that messianic king who will fulfill the prophecy of Nathan regarding an everlasting kingdom, and who will be confirmed as the very Son of God by his father. This coming king will rule over all the nations.

In Acts 4:25 the apostles see in this Psalm a prediction of the wrath of the nations and their rulers waging war upon the Messiah (specifically in the crucifixion of Jesus by Pilate and Herod). And this explains why, as we see in our New Testament lesson (Acts 13:13 ff.), that Paul can go into the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch and in the middle of a sermon to the Jews in which the Apostle is explaining why Jesus is Israel's Messiah, he can cite the second Psalm as proof of that very point. Jesus is confirmed as God's messianic son because God raised Jesus from the dead. In verses 32-33 we read that Paul proclaimed, *"we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, 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.'"* The apostles clearly saw the messianic coronation in this Psalm as pointing ahead past David and Solomon to Jesus Christ and his resurrection from the dead.

Because this royal Psalm is also messianic, it borders on blasphemy whenever kings and royals make appeal to this Psalm in their own coronations, because the Psalm refers specifically to the throne of David, and to that messianic king who now rules over all the nations and their rulers from the heavenly Zion. This Psalm promises God's covenant blessing to those who kiss the Son through faith and submit to his will in gratitude. Psalm 2 warns all those who reject Jesus' Lordship that they will face his wrath. Far better to kiss the Son through faith, then face his wrath which can flare up in an instant. Kiss the son!

¹¹ Kidner, Psalms 1-72, 53.