

4. Man in the dock: Why do the nations rage?

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[0 : 0 0] to page 448 in our visitors' Bibles. I can see some of you smiling there, thinking I got confused as to whether I was a man or a woman.

But the reason I was singing all the parts is because the people downstairs have to watch my lips so they know when to come in, otherwise they can't sing at the right time. So I should have told you that in advance, and then maybe you've been more comfortable.

But don't panic. Well, we're doing a series these Sunday mornings on the questions, some of the great questions that God, through His Word, asks to men and women.

And our question this week is right there in the very first line of our psalm, Psalm 2. You'll see it there. It's a very serious question indeed, isn't it? Why do the nations rage?

I think if you have an NIV, it says, why do the nations conspire? That is a question that many people in the world are asking, isn't it?

[1 : 0 8] They're asking it, if you like, to God, if God exists. Sometimes it's framed like this. Why is the world in such a mess? Why are the nations at each other's throats, at loggerheads, and strife, and calamity, and war, and hatred?

Why is the world as it is? If there is a God, well, surely it must be His fault, mustn't it? Why doesn't He act to do something about this world that we live in? And if He doesn't act?

Well, it must just be evidence, mustn't it, that there is no God at all. He's not there. God is not there in the Bible, therefore it must be all fairy tales. And we should reject it.

Why is the world in such a mess? And that's right, isn't it? People ask that. They look at the wars, the turmoil, the genocides that we hear about, the terrorism that goes on around about us, and they say, where is God?

Where is your God, you Christians? But I want you to notice here this morning that in this psalm here, it's certainly not the Bible that's on the back foot, is it?

[2 : 2 5] In fact, it's the Bible, and it's the Christian believer, who's asking that question to the world. The psalmist, you see, knows the answer to the world's question about why the world is as it is, and he's got a question of his own.

And his question has a very different emphasis. You see, the Bible's question is not, what's the reason for the world's turmoil? The Bible knows that. The Bible's question, rather, is what is the purpose of your raging in the world?

The Bible knows the reason that the world is in the state it's in. It's because mankind and our nations and our leaders, according to verse 1, are united in rebellion against God and against his anointed one.

The rulers, they take counsel together, says verse 1, against the Lord and against his anointed one. And the Bible says, can't you see that that's true? And can't you see how absolutely futile, indeed how absurd it should be, that the world should so conspire against the Lord, the God of heaven?

How can it possibly be anything other than absurd to think that the world, created by God, could ever prevail in its alliance against him? So why do the nations rage?

[3 : 53] That's the question. Do the united nations of the world know who it is they're up against when they rage and rail against the Lord and his anointed one?

That's the question that the psalm puts to us. But I want us to look at the four voices that speak to us in this psalm. I wonder if you noticed that as we read through. You see, there's a question, isn't there, in verse 1.

And then from verse 2 onwards to the end of the psalm, there are four different voices that speak to us and give their opinion, their answers. First of all, in verses 2 and 3, we have the united nations of the world speaking, don't we?

The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.

That's the voices of the powers that be in our world. The voices of the ruling elites, the political elites, the intellectual elites, the cultural leaders of our world.

[4 : 59] And according to this psalm, what they are saying is words of rage and rebellion against God and his anointed one. And that's what explains the world.

We live in a world that is united against God and his son, his Messiah. In fact, if you think about it, that is one of the very few things that can unite the peoples of our world, isn't it?

I mean, think about it. What does the modern secularists in our Western culture, the modern secularists, what do they have in common with fanatical Islamists?

What does somebody like Polly Toynbee, the guardian columnist, what does she possibly have in common with, well, let's say, Osama bin Laden? Well, the answer is a hatred and a derision for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, that derision, that hatred can be expressed in outright raging as described in verse 1. Just think, for example, of the way that atheistic communism suppressed the church in the Eastern Bloc before the fall of the Berlin Wall and so on, and continues to do today in some parts of the world.

[6 : 15] That's verse 1, isn't it? Rulers taking counsel, raging, vehement force against those who name the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. read the literature that comes from some of the organizations that seek to help persecuted Christians.

And you see pages and pages of evidence of just that. The raging of those who hate God and his people. But it can be, of course, much more subtle, can't it?

Very hidden, very snide, but just the same. It's there. The plotting, the murmuring. That's literally what it says in verse 2. Taking counsel together. Murmuring behind closed doors.

It's the kind of thing that goes on, doesn't it, in the politically correct establishment in our secular nations. The subtle murmurings that gradually begin to erode the truth.

The truth of God. It goes on in our schools behind closed doors. It goes on in the media, doesn't it? It goes on in our civil lawmaking bodies.

[7 : 23] Certainly, in Britain today, that's true. Although today, I would say, it's much more than murmuring, isn't it? Things that were spoken about quietly in the background, in the corridors of power, in the media, places like that, 30 years ago, are now, well, they're now blatantly shouted about and championed.

And so we find today in our culture, don't we, we find extraordinary alliances among the leaders of opinion, the politicians, the broadcasters, the educationalists.

Extraordinary alliances together, people having a concerted attack in all kinds of different ways. Some outright and noisy, some shrouded and quiet. But against the Bible's clear teaching, against God's clear teaching on all sorts of things.

Marital fidelity, sexual purity, issues to do with family life, all kinds of things. At first it is those plottings in the back room of the avant-garde television producers or the senior common rooms in the elite universities.

But of course now it's becoming much more part of mainstream culture, isn't it? Things that were like that 30 years ago that would have horrified us that no one would have dared to speak in public and are plastered all over the billboards and broadcast on the airways.

[8 : 46] And so we rejoice today, don't we, in our post-modern, our post-Christian, our secular culture. God has been long forgotten in modern Britain, in modern Scotland.

His word is scorned increasingly and forgotten. And we laugh as a culture today, don't we? We laugh, we say, ha ha, the leading lights of our world. Just verse 3, isn't it?

We cast off the bondage, the stifling cords, the forces of conservatism, of God and his ways, all that old-fashioned nonsense. Hurrah! It's in the dustbin of history.

Our dear Scottish Calvinist heritage. Never see the word Calvinist in the newspaper without dear preceding it. Have you noticed that? We've cast off the repression of our past.

As we've deluded ourselves, haven't we? Into thinking that, for example, our newfound sexual liberation has brought us such happiness. Has it brought us a wonderfully happy society?

[9 : 53] Well, the newspapers tell me that it's brought us rampant sexually transmitted diseases. One of the depressing things in Britain, isn't it? We're never top of the league in anything. In sports or in culture or anything else.

But we are top of the league in teenage sexually transmitted disease and teenage pregnancies. Let's give a big cheer for that one. Has it brought us happiness?

With the horrors of AIDS, the miseries of abortion, the collapse of marriages and family life? But no, no, we disregard all of that and we laugh and we say, ha, ha, ha.

We've cast off the restraints, the bonds, the fetters of God that held us. And we scorn his anointed one. But you see, the Bible says to us in this question, why?

Are you mad? Why do you rage? It's so stupid. Can't you see that you're in the grip of a satanic delusion?

[10 : 57] Can't you see the madness of rejecting God's perfect ways, his ways of blessing and security for ways that only bring destruction, ways that only bring misery? Why?

Do you rage and do such things? That's the question the Bible asks to the world, to our society. That's the question the Christian believer must be asking to our world.

Because you see, the Christian believer knows something. He's heard a voice from heaven. Look at verses four to six. The second voice in this psalm, isn't it? It's God himself who speaks now.

And his words are both words of laughter and of wrath. He laughs, but he's not joining in the laughter of the world. No. He's laughing at the world.

And he's laughing at the scorn. Look at verse four. He who sits in the heavens laughs. The Lord holds them in derision. You see, there is a throne in heaven. And from that omnipotent throne, God laughs with derision the puny and pathetic and the pitiful arrogance of man.

[12 : 08] I wonder if that shocks you. It will shock you if your view of God is a sentimental fantasy of your own making. But the God of the Bible, let me tell you, is very, very shocking.

Or at least he's shocking to proud and arrogant humanity that thinks can call all the shots. Now you see, there is a God in heaven and he is pricking the bubble of human pomposity and human pride.

And nothing cuts us, does it, so much as thinking that we're being laughed at. We know that, don't we? A child comes running and crying. Daddy, they're laughing at me.

We hate it, don't we? They're a teenager. Nothing more cutting and wounding for you at school or at college, is it, than to be laughed at. But God is laughing at us when we think like that as human beings.

He's laughing us to scorn. If only we'd see that. But you see, so often we don't see it, do we? We as Christians so often are cowed and fearful, aren't we?

[13 : 20] We think that the world's laughter is the last laugh, don't we? That's what it often looks like, doesn't it? We look at the scornful disdain that we see of our faith in the media, in the newspapers, on the radio.

When did you ever see, for example, somebody portrayed in a film on television or a program, somebody who's a clergyman, somebody who works for the church, when do you ever see somebody like that portrayed in anything other than derogatory terms?

You come and tell me afterwards. Think of the vicar in Dad's army, that pathetic creature. Think of the gross ridicule of the Vicar of Dibley. But that's the way our media portrays those who stand to speak for the truth of God, isn't it?

When did you ever see the church portrayed in anything other than derogatory terms? Think back to the famous sketch in the Not the Nine O'Clock News and the vicar there with the organist and the tin of beans.

That's what people think of church. That's what our media speaks of. And it looks to us, doesn't it, as Christians, so often that the media, that our secular world, our scorn for world round about us, has the last laugh all the time as far as God and the church of the gospel is concerned.

[14 : 33] We read that the biting scorn of the columnists, yes, a Polly Toynbee or a Christopher Hitchens or a Matthew Paris who's becoming more and more vitriolic, isn't he?

Just speaking about that the other day. I hope you do read these things in the newspapers. We as Christians need to read these and know the world that we're living in, the culture that we're living in. I hope some of you have looked, by the way, at the website and the excellent resource that Donald Fleming's been putting on there for us.

Every week he trawls through all the newspapers and puts a paragraph summarizing every single article that's to do with the Christian faith or indeed any other religion or ethics on our website every week.

He sends it to me. It's terrific. I can read every single article from most of the British papers and sometimes others. But you need to read these things. But if you do, very often you'll feel that we're on the back foot.

We feel the scorn that they have for God. We feel the scorn they have for the Word of God. The derision that they have for the Christian person. And it does seem as though they're in charge, as though they're laughing at us.

[15 : 38] But no, you see, friends, the reality is very, very different. Look up to heaven, says the psalmist. And you'll see that it's God, in fact, who has the last laugh.

And it's not passive laughter either that this God in heaven is exhibiting. It is active and it's acting. You see, he's unveiling his fury at this rebellious world.

Look at verse 5. He will speak to them in his wrath and terrify them in his fury. God is not helpless.

But what is that? What is the Word of God's wrath? Well, the answer is there in verse 6, isn't it? He has set his king to rule in Zion. That is what is God's revelation of wrath and of judgment on mankind, that he has set his king to rule.

What does that mean? Well, let's listen to the third voice. The voice of the king himself, the voice of the Son of God. You see, the United Nations speak, don't they, with words of rage and rebellion.

[16 : 48] And God replies with words of laughter and wrath. But then in verses 7 to 9, God's Son himself speaks. And his words are words of victory and power.

He tells us what God himself has declared about him. Look at verse 7. I will tell of the decree. The Lord said to me, you are my son. Today I have begotten you.

Ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

You see, God acts against his enemies by enthroning his Son in the heavens. Now, you see, the psalmist here is prophesying, isn't he?

But the New Testament tells us very clearly, very plainly, of the fulfillment of all of this in the victorious enthronement of the risen Jesus Christ. That today, in verse 7, there is the day of the resurrection and the ascension to glory of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[17 : 55] If you're in any doubt about that, look to Acts chapter 13. The apostle himself tells us very plainly, listen, Acts chapter 13, verses 32 and 33. We bring you the good news, says the apostle, 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.

You see, the gospel of the New Testament, as preached by the apostles, is the message that God's son reigns as the ruler on high in heaven. terrible. I hope you noticed in verse 9, the very shocking nature of that rule, what will he do?

This one who rules over the nations to the ends of the earth? He'll break them with a rod of iron, dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

His rule is awesome and terrible according to this psalm, because it is an unveiling of the wrath and the judgment of God.

And that might shock you again, to discover that the apostles' message, the gospel of the New Testament, the very heart of the New Testament gospel, was that message. God has raised his son to be the ruler and the judge on high, to break the nation.

[19 : 24] But there's absolutely no question that that was the message the apostles preached. You need to read through the Acts of the Apostles. Let me quote to you again, this time from Acts chapter 17, when Paul was speaking on Mars Hill to the professors, the intellectual elites.

It wasn't a dumbed-down message for people in the gutter. What did he say to these intellectually gifted and elite echelon of people in the ancient world?

Acts chapter 17, verse 31. He has fixed the day for judgment. By the man he has appointed. And of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

You see, the world rages against God. Plots it. It takes counsel. It murmurs. It scorns the Lord, the God of the Bible. It scorns his anointed one, his Christ, his Son.

It will put up with any other kind of religions and gods and spiritualities. Anything but the true God and his unique Christ.

[20 : 29] Isn't that so? It will last that to scorn. We can't have that. We can't have that exclusive idea. There are many in the professing church who have bowed to that tyranny and said the same.

But, says the Bible, the Christ, the anointed one, God's Son, alone has been enthroned. And God has spoken once and for all, finally, in these last days.

In his Son, says the book of Hebrews. And that word that he has spoken in his Son is a word of awesome and terrifying judgment. That's the Bible's message.

Maybe you think that's offensive and indigestible. And I suppose it is offensive, isn't it? But look again at verse 7 to 9. I'm not making this up.

It's not me speaking in verse 9, is it? It's the Son of God himself. He's telling us what it means for the world that God has exalted him. And he's speaking it to us.

[21 : 32] He's speaking it to the peoples of the world. That means we better listen, haven't we? But there's one more voice in the psalm, isn't there, in verses 10 to 12.

Can you see? See, it's now the voice of the psalmist himself, isn't it? It's the voice of the Christian believer. And he speaks because, you see, unlike the world, he's too busy scoffing and scorning God, unlike the world, he has listened to the word of revelation, to the voice from heaven.

And therefore he sees the truth. He grasps the truth. He understands. And so he can speak to the world. He's got a message. He's got a gospel. And what is his message?

Well, it's a two-fold word, isn't it? It's a word of fearful warning on the one hand, but also it's a word of gracious promise, isn't it? Do you see? As always in the Bible, the warning comes first.

Do you see verse 10? Now therefore, kings, be wise, be warned, O rulers of the earth. What is the message of the Christian to the world?

[22 : 41] Well, according to the Bible, the message of the Christian believer to the world is consistently this. Flee from the wrath to come. Flee from the wrath of the Christ, the Lamb of God.

Don't be fools, you kings and wise ones. That's what the Lord says. Be warned, verse 10. Be warned, you policy makers, you opinion formers, you clever interviewers in the media.

Be warned. Listen. You who are the politicians that rule, the judges that decide, the academics, the columnists, all of those who form and shape the thinking of our world.

Listen. Fear this God. Serve him with trembling. Verse 11. Serve the Lord with fear. Rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son. Lest he be angry.

And you perish in the way for his wrath. His quickly kindle. It's a warning, isn't it? It's an urgent warning to repent.

[23 : 50] To bow to the Lordship of Jesus Christ before that day when the judge comes. Very solemn and serious, isn't it? There's nothing trite about the gospel of this Christian believer.

It is a warning. But it's also a promise, isn't it? Do you see the very last line? That day will come, that dreadful day, the day of judgment. But there is still a day called today.

How much longer? None of us knows this morning. It could be an instant. It could be a thousand years. But there is a day of grace. There's a day of salvation.

A day of favor. Because God's answer to the arrogance of human nature, to the rebellion of our ways against him, is not judgment alone.

It is judgment, but not judgment alone. And that is the astonishing message of Scripture, isn't it? When you realize the magnitude of our rebellion, that God has not sent his Son just, and first of all, as a judge, but that he sent him as a servant, as a suffering king, as a saving king, as one who suffered the avalanche of his own wrath, to be broken by the rod of his own anger, so that he could also be a savior.

[25 : 12] So that he could be a refuge for all who would flee, not from him. That's impossible, says this psalm. But flee to him. And so that too is our message to the world as Christian believers, isn't it?

It's a certain promise. The very last line of this psalm. Blessed are all, all, who take refuge in him. Who do serve the Lord Jesus Christ with fear.

Who do kiss the Son of God and submit to him and make him their Lord, alone above all others. So there's nothing trite about that message either, is there? It's a glorious message.

A warning, yes, but certainly a promise. So you see, God's question is clear and stark, isn't it? Why on earth do you nations rage?

United against God and his anointed one. How can you ever think that you can reject him with impunity? No, you simply haven't begun, if you think like that, to grasp the reality of the one true and living God.

[26 : 18] You simply haven't begun to understand that his rod of iron is unbreakable. And that his rod will, without any question at all, break every single man and woman who has ever lived or ever will live in this world.

Either it will break them with a merciful breaking, shattering all pride and arrogance and bringing to repentance, so that we flee to him for mercy and for refuge.

Or, for those who will not be broken by his mercy, it will be a terrible breaking of judgment, crushing utterly those who will refuse to the end to bow the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Go on plotting and scheming and scorning and deriding and rejecting the truth of the one true God. That's the message of this psalm.

So friends, let's not be on the back foot as Christian believers. Let's not be cowed and intimidated by a hostile world, by an aggressive world, a world where the one thing that does and will unite people is a scorn and a hatred for the Lord Jesus Christ, the one true God.

[27 : 39] Yes, this world speaks and will speak words of rage and rebellion, but we need not fear these words, ever. Have no fear of them, says Jesus in Matthew 10, for nothing that is covered will not be revealed or hidden that will not be known.

what I say to you in the dark, he says, say it in the light, what you have heard whispered, proclaim it on the housetops. You see, we can speak with confidence according to Jesus because we know what the scoffing world refuses to know.

We know it because we've heard the voice from heaven, the voice of revelation, the gospel of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has spoken. It reveals his scornful laughter of all his enemies and also his wrath for those who will not have his rule.

That's why Jesus says to his followers, do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, fear him who can cast both body and soul into hell.

And you see, God's Son has also spoken, hasn't he, in words of victory and power. He has revealed his word to the world uniquely and forever.

[28 : 56] And he's revealed his answer to our rebellion against him. And that answer is that he has been proclaimed both Lord and Christ. That he reigns exalted above the heavens.

And that he makes the world his footstool. And so you see, we as Christian believers, we have a message for our world. Even for the kings, even for the rulers, even for those who seem absolutely untouchable and way beyond us.

We have a word of challenge for them and we have a word of grace for them. Why do you rage, we must ask, against the Lord and his anointed?

Do you not know that Jesus Christ is risen, that he's exalted, that he reigns on high, that he is King and Lord of all? God has set his king on Zion Hill forever and he comes to reign.

So we are his heralds. We are his ambassadors, aren't we, says Paul. As if God was making his appeal through us. We have a word that says, be reconciled to God.

[30 : 01] Kiss the Son. Take refuge in him. That's our gospel word, isn't it? To all who will listen, to all in the world, high or low. Because we know that the only alternative for those who persist in that perverse refusal must be, mustn't it, to face his wrath.

And so we have a gospel to proclaim and we must proclaim it. The Bible is absolutely and abundantly clear. There is no refuge from him. But there is refuge abundantly and forever.

There is refuge, there is safety, there is salvation, there is joy in him and in him alone. And so we say to all the words of verse 12, don't we?

Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you perish in the way for his wrath is quickly kindled. We say that, don't we, with solemnity. We say it with dread, but we must say it. But we also say this, don't we, with urgency.

We say this with real joy, blessed are all, all, who take refuge in him. A word of warning and a word of great grace and promise.

[31 : 23] Don't be on the back foot. The Bible sets the agenda. God is asking the questions and we must ask them on his behalf, but also give his answer.

And a great and wonderful answer it is, blessed are all who take refuge in him. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.