

Psalm 2 A kiss for the king

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In Luke 24,

Jesus is walking on the road to Emmaus with two of his disciples.

It's after the resurrection.

The two disciples have been kept from recognising him.

And it says this about what Jesus said to them,

"Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets,

he explained to them

what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."

This is Jesus explaining the gospel to the disciples from the Scriptures.

And it's all Old Testament.

The New Testament had not been written yet.

How would you go,

if you had to explain the gospel to someone using only the Old Testament?

I think most Christian people wouldn't know where to start.

Hopefully you would find Isaiah 53.

I would be a bit sad if most of you didn't find that one.

That would be top of my list.

2 Samuel 7 is pretty important.

Ez 34, 36, 37.

Jer 31

Is 7, 9, 11.

Gen 3:15.

Deut 18, OK I'm getting to passages

that I wouldn't have been able to quote before I went to Bible college now.

It's not so easy to explain the gospel from the OT, is it?

Who's got another passage for me?

Any suggestions?

OK, here's another question for you.

Which Old Testament passage  
do the New Testament writers quote most often  
when they want to preach the gospel?  
Which would you think?

It's Psalm 2.

Psalm 23 is never quoted in the NT.

Psalm 2 is quoted in the gospels, twice in Acts, twice in Hebrews,  
twice in Revelation.

When the apostles wanted to preach the gospel from the Old Testament,  
Psalm 2 was a go to passage.

And remember that it was a good couple of decades after the resurrection  
that the first NT books were written.

1 Corinthians was written about AD55.

Jesus rose about AD33.

That's 22 years of proclaiming the gospel with no NT books.

And it was Psalm 2 that one of the key passages used.

So that's a pretty good reason for us to spend some time on this psalm.

But we don't want to run before we can walk.

Before we think about preaching the gospel from Psalm 2,  
we need to know what it meant to the original readers.

Before we try to work out what it means for us,  
we need to know what it meant for them.

Step 1 what it meant.

Step 2 what it means.

You should always do this.

You can't be sure you are being a responsible interpreter  
about what it means for us,

unless you have done the hard work on what it meant for them.

Let's do step 1 quickly so we can get to the interesting bit.

The Psalm breaks into four scenes.

Scene 1.

"Why do the nations conspire  
and the peoples plot in vain?  
The kings of the earth rise up  
and the rulers band together  
against the Lord and his anointed, saying,  
"Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles.""  
The Psalmist is saying,  
"I just don't get it.  
God has put his king on the throne of Israel,  
and the other nations rebel against him.  
It's just nuts."

Scene 2.

"The one enthroned in heaven laughs;  
the Lord scoffs at them.  
He rebukes them in his anger;  
and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,  
"I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain.""  
God thinks their rebellion is funny.  
He scoffs at it.  
He's put the king in Jerusalem.  
As if they can devise some clever military strategy  
to get rid of the king God has put there.  
God's in charge.  
Who do you think would win an argument  
between Shakespeare and Hamlet?  
Shakespeare writes the play.  
Hamlet is a character in the play.  
Shakespeare puts the words in Hamlet's mouth.  
It's not even a question.

The one who writes the play calls the shots.

Scene 3.

"I will proclaim the Lord's decree:

He said to me, 'You are my son;  
today I have become your father.

Ask me and I will make the nations your inheritance,  
the ends of the earth your possession.

You will break them with a rod of iron,  
you will dash them to pieces like pottery."

This is now the King of Israel speaking.

He proclaims to the world what God has said about him.

It's the words of the prophet Nathan to King David  
talking about David's heir.

2 Sam 7:13-14 "I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.  
I will be his father and he will be my son."

It speaks of the close relationship between Almighty God  
and the Kings in the line of David.

And it speaks of the fulfilment of God's promise  
to make his people rulers over the nations.

And of the futility of opposing God by opposing his chosen King.

Scene 4.

"Therefore, you kings, be wise;  
be warned rulers of the earth.

Serve the Lord with fear  
and celebrate his rule with trembling.

Kiss his son or he will be angry  
and your way will lead you to destruction,  
for his wrath can flare up in a moment.

Blessed are all who take refuge in him."

The psalmist moves to giving the right response.

If God has chosen his king,  
And promised to be as a father to his chosen king,  
then the only way to respond is to serve God  
and acknowledge the rule of his king.  
We think of a kiss as a gesture of affection  
but in the ancient world,  
you kissed the hand of king to show that you were in submission to him.  
So when you kiss the son of God,  
you are showing your submission to the King of Israel  
who God has declared to be his Son.

That's what the Psalm meant.  
It's a strident declaration  
to anyone who is not on the side of the God of Israel,  
that they'd better fall into line or else.

The other thing to say about this Psalm from the perspective of a Jew  
is that it is crying out for more fulfilment.  
How could a Jew whose nation was in exile in Babylon,  
or a Jew whose nation had returned from exile  
but lived at the pleasure of the Persian Emperor,  
or a Jew whose nation lived at the pleasure of the Roman Emperor,  
believe that this psalm was fulfilled.  
When the Sanhedrin of Jesus day said jump,  
Tiberius Caesar was hardly saying, "How high?"  
Either the psalmist was expressing a pious hope of God's rule  
which had left his people bitterly disappointed,  
or there was another Davidic King yet to come.

Which leads us to the question of what does the psalm mean.  
We know what it meant, but what does it mean now?  
Well for the New Testament authors,

there is no question.

The King over God's people is Jesus.

Jesus is the one of whom at his baptism the Father says,

"You are my beloved Son  
with you I am well pleased."

So we read this psalm as being about Jesus,  
the final Davidic king.

So, "Why do the nations rage  
and the peoples plot in vain?

The kings of the earth rise up  
and the rulers band together against the Lord  
and against his anointed one."

In Acts 4,

The apostles Peter and John saw this speaking of Herod and Pilate  
raging and plotting against Jesus.

They conspired against Jesus.

But it was all in vain because he rose from the dead.

And you don't have to look far today to see ruler types  
raging against the Lordship of Jesus.

Once that took my fancy this week  
was the principals of the elite Anglican Schools up in Sydney.

The Sydney Diocese released a ruling  
that said that principals of its schools had to affirm  
that marriage is between a man and a woman.

And if they wouldn't sign that  
then they would have to resign from their jobs.

Well the principals were in the SMH venting their spleens  
saying just how irate they are.

But in the end it's not the Diocese of Sydney they are raging against.  
It's Jesus.

Jesus said,

Mt 19:4-6 "Haven't you read that at the beginning  
the creator made them male and female,  
and said, 'For this Reason a man will leave his father and his mother  
and be united to his wife,  
and the two will become one flesh."

The Sydney principals can vent their spleens  
and talk about how irate they are,  
but God has installed his king.

The king's name is Jesus.

And what Jesus says goes.

I have to confess to finding it somewhat gratifying  
seeing these powerful people.

I mean they are earning north of \$0.5M per year,  
they manage budgets in the tens of millions per year.

And no one gives them orders on their patch.

They are undisputed Lords of their schools.

But they are reduced to spluttering incoherent rage

because they are being forced to toe the line to what Jesus says.

And that is what it is like at the end of the day for every human ruler.

They will all toe the line to what Jesus says.

2:3 "The one enthroned in heaven laughs;"

God is not the slightest bit perturbed about people raging against Jesus.

Comedian Ricky Gervais says

"There are 3000 gods out there that humans have believed in.

You don't believe in 2999 of them.

I don't believe in just one more."

God says,

you can make all the smart comments you like.

I have installed my king.

His name is Jesus.

He's going to be your judge.

He's not giving you a mark out of 10 for how funny you are.  
He will be deciding whether you have celebrated his rule with trembling.

It's very interesting  
that the apostles used this psalm to proclaim the gospel.  
Because it's purely and simply about how God's son rules.  
We are used to focusing in on the atonement when we present the gospel.  
Jesus died on the cross for your sins.  
You could do that from Isaiah 53.  
But the simplest statement of the gospel in the NT is 3 words.  
Jesus is Lord.

And when you say "Jesus is Lord"  
that means that no one and nothing is Lord alongside of him.  
Paul is preaching the gospel in Acts 13.  
Here is part of what he said,  
Acts 13:32-33 "We tell you the good news:  
what God has promised our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children,  
by raising up Jesus."

Hold on a second,  
where did God promise that he would raise up Jesus?

"As it is written in the second Psalm:

"You are my Son;  
today I have become your father."

The apostles see the declaration of Jesus' divine sonship in Psalm 2.  
And that's good enough for a promise of the resurrection  
particularly when you read it alongside Psalm 16  
which Paul quotes a verse or two later.

So this is how the apostles preached the gospel.

God's Son rules.

You can read about it in Psalm 2.

Jesus is God's Son.

You had better submit to the rule of God's Son.



If you don't you will face the consequences.  
It's a very in your face presentation of the gospel.  
It feels almost military in its tone.  
God is your commanding officer.  
Do as you are told or else!

And as we move into the book of Revelation,  
the parts of Psalm 2 that get quoted become more confronting not less.  
In Revelation 2, Jesus is writing a letter to the church in Thyatira.

He says,

Rev 2:26-27 "To the one who is victorious  
and does my will to the end,

I will give authority over the nations -

(here's the quote from Psalm 2)

that one will rule them with an iron sceptre  
and will dash them to pieces like pottery."

Jesus has conquered evil.

And to the Christian who sticks with their faith to the very end,  
Jesus will give authority to judge the world alongside of him.

So now it's not just the Son of God who breaks them with a rod of iron,  
his people are raised up alongside of him  
and we too participate in his judgement on the world.

This is on the last day.

It's not a blank cheque

to go out and take to evil doers with a baseball bat after the service.

But it is telling you that you have a role to play in the final judgement.

As Paul says to the Corinthians,

1 Cor 6:2 "Or do you not know  
that the Lord's people will judge the world?"

That's us!

I'm not sure how you feel about that.

I have a sense that I would sort of rather that God did the tough stuff

and I just went to be with him in heaven when he finished.  
Even if I agree that God needs to do justice,  
my tummy is a bit squeamish  
to do the dashing to pieces like pottery myself.  
It's a bit like how I'm happy to eat meat,  
but I don't want to work in an abattoir.

What that basically tells me is that I've lead a sheltered life.  
If I'd seen family members murdered by a blood thirsty tyrant,  
like many of my Christian brothers and sisters have,  
then I wouldn't be quite so squeamish  
about meting out justice to the tyrants on judgement day.

And so the Psalm concludes,  
"Serve the Lord with fear  
and celebrate his rule with trembling.  
Kiss his Son or he will be angry  
and your way will lead you to destruction."  
What that means for us is that we need to serve the Lord Jesus with fear.  
And celebrate Jesus' rule with trembling.  
We need to give the kiss of submission to Jesus.  
Submission or destruction.  
Kiss the Son or kiss it all goodbye.

When I was a teenager,  
it used to be a caricature of the excesses of American evangelicalism.  
Turn or burn!  
Trust or combust!  
Choose or lose, bro!  
And we used to have a little chuckle  
about such an insensitive way of proclaiming the gospel.  
We are Australians,

we would never be so gauche.  
Those crazy Americans ...

But when the apostles were looking for Bible passages  
to present the gospel  
and they only had the OT to choose from,  
Psalm 2 was a go to passage.  
And it's basically a turn or burn passage.  
"Serve the Lord with fear  
and celebrate his rule with trembling.  
Kiss his Son or he will be angry  
and your way will lead you to destruction."

And I wonder if our gospel presentation shouldn't reflect  
a little more of this confidence in what God is going to do.  
Particularly if we were presenting the gospel  
to people who live in a confrontational world.  
You don't imagine that the folks at HMAS Cerberus  
would be mincing their words and skirting around the issue  
when they speak to each other do you?  
Or what about a group of merchant bankers  
used to playing hard ball to close the deal?  
Here's how things are,  
take it or leave it,  
the deal expires when you die.  
Accept Jesus as your Lord now or face destruction later.

And yet for those of us  
who are looking for a bit of shelter from the dog eat dog world,  
who are looking for someone to shield us  
from the kings of the earth rising up and the rulers banding together,  
then the last line of the psalm is a great comfort.

Blessed are all who take refuge in him.  
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.  
Yes he will smash his enemies like pottery.  
But for we who kiss the Son  
he will be our refuge.  
He will shield us from the Father's wrath against sin.  
He will raise us up from the dead.  
He will make us rulers alongside of him to judge the world.  
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.