

Gamma 12

Study 2

Meditation

PSALM 2

1. Compare Psalm 2:1-3 with Psalm 1:1-3. How would you characterize the differences in subject matter and orientation?

The nouns of Psalm 1 are individual ("the man," "he") while the nouns of Psalm 2 are corporate ("the nations," "the peoples," "the kings," "the rulers"). The verbs of Psalm 1 are quiet and personal ("walk" "delight" "meditate") while the verbs of Psalm 2 are violent and political ("conspire," "plot," "take their stand," "break their chains").

The difference could not be greater! While the orientation of Psalm 1 is very personal and inward, the orientation of Psalm 2 is frankly political and outward. Psalm 1 is looking at the internal, invisible landscape of the heart and the will, while Psalm 2 is looking at the external, visible social landscape of kings and nations. Wisdom, then, is to have fierce delight in the kingdom of God. This is as corporate a psalm (emphasizing a commitment to the spread of the kingdom of God) as Psalm 1 is individual (emphasizing personal devotion).

2. Ironically, the words "meditate" in Psalm 1:2 and "plot" in Psalm 2:1 are the very same word in Hebrew. How is the use of the word the same in both psalms? How is it different?

We said earlier that "meditation" refers what your heart of hearts does to any foundational principle or idea. For example, if you believe that you aren't worth anything unless you make a lot of money, your heart takes hold of that and does a lot of dreaming and applying of that "truth" to your emotions and actions. Your heart compares your financial status with others'; it envies people with a lot of money; it worries about what will happen if this deal doesn't come through; it fantasizes about what you will be able to do and buy if you get to the economic level you are pursuing. All of these — the envy, the worry, the dreaming, the comparing, the planning, the scheming — are forms of meditating on the central (false) premise about money.

Here we see that "the peoples" believe that obedience to God is a form of slavery. In verse 3, we see that, in general, the peoples of the world interpret the laws and claims of God to be a form of oppression. "Discontent... clarifies into the resolve of verse 3, a typically blind reaction to God's easy yoke." ¹ (See Matthew 11:28-30.) This basic (false) premise about the nature of God and obedience is a foundational life-lie that becomes the basis for all kinds of "plotting" or meditation. This is a fascinating way to look at the worry, anger,

fantasizing, and scheming that our minds and hearts so often do. Often they are based on a false belief or premise that our mind is, in a sense, “meditating” on.

3. In verses 4-6, what is God’s attitude toward the supposed power of the nations? Why is the belief of verse 3 so laughable? (See the reasons in verse 1.) Why do we need that perspective when we pray?

God finds the bluster and vaunted power of worldly elites and nations funny. He laughs at them. Eugene Peterson says that we need to have the same perspective,² especially when we watch the evening news. So many things that are considered matters of importance, glory, and weightiness are silly and will come to nothing. As one hymn puts it, “Fading is the worldling’s pleasure, all its boasted pomp and show. Solid joys and lasting treasure, none but Zion’s children know.”³

Why is the belief so laughable? The people who run the world don’t see the Word of God as truth that roots and heals (Ps. 1) but rather as a chain that enslaves us (2:3). But to think of God’s rule as slavery is irrational: it posits more wisdom to us than we have and engages in a character assassination of God. Notice that verse 1 is a question without an answer. It asks, “*Why* do all the nations spend their time plotting to live lives independent of God’s law and devise glory independent of his glory?” No answer is given because it is a rhetorical question, an expression of amazement. It is like saying to someone who is doing something self-destructive and foolish, “*Why* are you killing yourself like this?” That is not a real request for information. It is a statement of astonishment and an appeal to the person to see how ridiculous and crazy he or she is.

Why do we need this perspective when we pray? Eugene Peterson thinks that the purpose of this psalm is to get us to “pray [through] our intimidation.”⁴ We need a very positive, confident attitude toward the world when we pray. We should not feel that the darkness, injustice, and foolishness of the world will prevail. God is in control. Then we will pray in confidence. God laughs at the world’s rebellion. That is an assurance to us (not sadistic of him!). We need to see that there is no chance of his kingdom losing. Intimidation by the world (Psalm 2) is as fatal to prayer as an attraction to it (Psalm 1)!

There is a second way the perspective of this psalm helps us. When *we* feel that God’s rule over us is bondage, it is the remnant of the world’s mindset in us. Sometimes we have to remind ourselves that this natural sinful attitude is idiotic and laughable.

4. In verses 6-7, what is God’s answer to the world’s evil and injustice? What do we learn about this “King” in verses 6-12?

“You are my Son” is God’s answer to the world’s evil and injustice. “This... is the centerpiece, the answer awaited in verses 1-5 and expounded in 8-12. The / is emphatic; the opening is best translated “But as for me, I have set...” After the bombast of verse 3, this is the neglected voice that has the final say.”⁵

God's answer to the world's rebellion is the "installation" of the Messianic king. This will be the ultimate way in which the rebellion of the world is revealed as foolishness and crushed to pieces.

What do we learn about this "King"? First, he is installed on "Zion" (v. 6), the hill inside Jerusalem where the temple was built. This teaches us two things: (a) Zion was a temple-hill, the place where sacrifices were offered to God. Thus, the Messiah showed the foolishness of the world's distrust of God when he died in love for us. (b) Zion was a little hill, not a majestic mountain. The Messiah did not come in a way the world expected. He did not come with pomp or the kind of power that impresses the world. (c) Zion was a "holy" or chosen hill. So the Messiah is all about grace.

Second, we learn that this Messiah will be the Son of God. The words "today I have become your Father" (v. 7) remind us that these Messianic prophecies have double meanings. Psalm 2 probably served as a coronation psalm. Whenever a new king of Israel was crowned, this psalm pointed to the ways in which he was a type of the coming Messiah, who would *truly* be the Son of God. On the day of coronation, the king is *declared* as Son and Servant, as Jesus was on the day of his baptism (Matt. 3:17).

Third, we see that this Messiah will not only be the king of Israel, but the King of all nations. This is a missionary mandate! When we preach the gospel, we are declaring that Jesus is already appointed Lord of every society. He is a Messiah for all the world.

In summary, it is pre-eminently in Christ that we see God's laughter at the rebellion of the world. God sets his Messiah on the throne, not just in spite of their rebellion but through it. Acts 4:24-31 shows that the people who thought they were destroying the Messiah only did "what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen." By slaying Jesus, they destroyed their own power. Thus the cross is the ultimate example of how laughable it is to rebel against God. It is laughable because it can't do a whit against him and it will be used *by* him to establish grace (see Ps. 76:10). However, God is *not* laughing at the suffering our rebellion costs or the price it took to deal with it.

Note: By divine inspiration, the psalmist looks down the entire course of history. He sees Jesus standing at judgment day, meting out justice. There is little reference (except to the coronation site of "Zion") to the death of the Messiah and the offer of forgiveness through repentance and faith. Instead, the writer looks to the end of time and sees how puny the supposed power of the world rulers will look before his feet.

5. How does the beatitude in verse 12 contradict the mindset of verses 1-3?

Derek Kidner observes, "The final beatitude leaves no doubt of the grace that inspires the call of verses 10ff. What fear and pride interpret as bondage (v. 3) is in fact security and bliss. And there is no *refuge* from him: only *in him*." ⁶