



Psalms of the Passion  
**DAILY LENT DEVOTIONS**

Week 1:  
Psalm 2

### From "Why" to "Why"

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

Can there be a question more human than "why"? My one-year-old August hasn't gotten to the infamous "why" stage yet, but we know it's coming. His older brother, our three-year-old Matthias, has prepped us just fine, though he has always been a bit more fond of the even more provocative "why not". "Why" is the question of the day. As faithful Christians, that word should forever be on our lips. My God, why would you let this happen? Why did this happen to me? To my family? My friends? My community? Why is there so much division in the land? Why can't we love you and love each other? I could go on, but you get the point.

The psalmist has a "why" question of his own today, and it's one we're probably familiar with. "Why do the nations rage?" We're thrust into an illustration by that final word. We're reminded of the sea, of waves so high and so mighty that they capsize trusty vessels and smash them against towering cliffs and jagged stones. The nations have become the destructive weapon of the deep, and they seek through their anger and their schemes and their plots to tear down the one true God and subjugate Him to what they believe a god should be. This is perhaps a familiar picture to us, living as we do in a world that rages like a sea in its own right, against itself but—most of all—against God.

But notice what all these plots and schemes and violent rages amount to: vanity. They are all for nothing. With just one prepositional phrase, the timbre of the question turns upside down. The psalmist isn't lamenting with a desperate "why"; he is sitting in the shelter of his God in total, confident bewilderment. "Why the violence?" he asks. "Can't they see how this will all end?"

Reading this psalm, we are brought into that heavenly perspective. Standing with the psalmist at the right hand of God, we observe a world that is broken—and it is so heartbreakingly broken—with the surety of victory given only through the promise of His Son, Jesus Christ. In Him, our "why's" don't end in desperate plea; they are taken by Him and restored through the life-giving power of His Word and return to us emboldened and declarative. "Why do the nations rage? Why do these waves threaten me? Can they not see that my foundation is Jesus Christ?"

And there can be no firmer foundation than Him.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, our firm foundation, take our whys of desperation and transform them into whys of confidence in you. You are Lord of this and every land, and with you we are always secure. Amen.

## God's Rules

*"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."*

Rules can be a drag. We all know it. We can all agree. And I *know* we'll all say otherwise. We've been shaped by rules more than we can recognize and far more than we'd care to admit. And rules are everywhere. They're in the games we play as kids, in the classroom, in the office, in the marriage covenant, everywhere! And most rules aren't even written down. Have you noticed that? There's this invisible *Zeitgeist* that regulates what is deemed acceptable and what's deemed inappropriate. For instance, I wouldn't wear flip-flops under my alb on a Sunday morning. There's no rule against that, but wouldn't that be weird? That would definitely raise a few eyebrows. Speaking of eyebrows, you should shave one of yours off. Do it. I dare you. You won't, will you. That's because it's against the unspoken rules! We don't just shave off singular eyebrows! And, if you do, you're usually trying to make a point.

We have a God of rules. Ain't no way around that one. God's rules are called the Law, and His Law tells us how to live in a godly way. We can't do them, obviously. Even if you tried *really hard* to keep just one your whole life, you'd still fail. God's Law, then, becomes something of a chain. It condemns you, binds you, marks you as one damned. We know this, and we don't like to hear it. Sin is ugly; it's repulsive. And nobody likes being reminded how frequently they fall short of God's expectations.

It should come as no surprise, then, that we chafe against God's Law. We've turned it—objectively something beautiful and perfect—into something ugly and judgmental. All too easily, we can sound like the kings and rulers of the earth: "Let us burst God's bonds and break the cords of His Law." We want to be our own masters; we want there to be no rules.

But, in Christ, God's Law drops its condemning finger and instead reaches out a guiding hand. Jesus died for our sins. He paid the price. He has made us right before God. Now, by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us, we can follow in Christ's footsteps and walk in the ways of God. The rules no longer damn; they enliven. What was once a trial is now an opportunity to live more like Christ. We'll fail, sure, but Christ will always pick us right back up again, dust us off, and continue guiding us along His Way.

Christ has not done away with the rules; rather, He has fulfilled them perfectly. And he is doing the same through us every day.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, we can so easily fall into the trap of thinking we can rule our lives better than You can. Help turn our eyes to you, and fill us with the Holy Spirit, that we might walk ever before You in newness of life. Amen.

## And God Laughs

*"He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath and terrify them in his fury, saying, 'As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.'*

We all like to laugh. And laughs can be really funny things. Have you thought about this? You've got your quiet laughers: your gigglers, your chucklers, and your ever-popular chortlers. There are silent laughers and breathy laughers. Then you have your *loud* laughers. You know the ones. The guffaws, the roars, the deep belly-laughs. You crack up, bust a gut, are in stitches. Laughter is contagious. It can be awkward, but it can rarely be false. You've heard the saying before, I'm sure: Laughter is the best medicine. Based on Proverbs 17:22 and supported by science, who can disagree? Christians can't. Non-Christians can't. Laughter is great! It's healing; it's soothing; it can deflate tension like a loose balloon.

And then God laughs.

This is less a "ha-ha" laugh and more an "uh-oh" laugh for us here on earth. More likely than not, this laugh won't be catching. Why? What's God laughing about? You have to picture the scene: the nations have cooked up their schemes. They're rising against God, trying once and for all to throw off the oppressive chains of His rule. The time is ripe, they think. Why not give regicide and decide a go, all at once? But God's not scared. Not even a little bit. What does He do? He laughs. He *laughs!* Hear the earth-shaking belly-laugh here. Hear the guffaws that flatten mountains and rip open the sky with thunder. This isn't joy. This is derision. God looks down on those who dare oppose Him—*Him!* God Almighty! Maker of heaven and earth!—and it's all so pathetic, so presumptuous, that it's laughable. Then he speaks, and only His Word could bring more terror than His laugh. He speaks His Word of wrath and fury and terror, and what does He say? "I have set my King on my holy hill." And the whole world quaked in its boots.

But then, something remarkable happened. God did just what He said He was going to do. He set His King on His holy hill. Only, this King—this great King of God—was stripped naked. Bloodied by the cat of nine tails. Crowned with thorns. Nailed to a cross. Exalted, not in glory but in derision. To anyone looking on, God's plan has gone horribly wrong. God's laughter appears to be nothing but a bluff. The schemes of the wicked have succeeded. Behold your King, O faithful ones!

But God's ways are not our own. God always keeps His promises, and so often He does so in ways we could never anticipate. We know how this story goes, but, for now, we are left with the cross. Left with that terrible death, with our King lifted high. We should never skip this terrible moment in order to reach our happily ever after.

So, too, in our world today. Times are difficult. You don't need me to tell you that. We live in a world divided. We live in a Church divided. We live with division in our own hearts! But listen for God's laughter. Listen for the scorn He has for evil and its petty schemes. And keep your eyes fixed on Him and on His King, whom He has placed on Zion, His holy hill.

Prayer: Defend us, O Lord, from the schemes of the enemy, and draw us near to Your life-giving cross. Amen.

## To Be a Son of God

*"I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you.'"*

It's hard not to jump to Jesus here, but let's make sure we do the legwork first. To begin, we should ask, "Who is speaking here?" V.7 of Psalm 2 is coming hot off a quotation from God Himself, where God declares that He will set His King on Zion. Now, the speaker has changed. Who will tell of the decree? Who has God claimed as His Son? We should always start by looking at the surrounding context. Explicit in the psalm itself, this could be God's Anointed King, mentioned in vv.2 and 6. That makes good sense. Your English translation no doubt aids in your interpretation here by capitalizing "Anointed," "King," and "Son." I've done the same in this devotion. Looks pretty cut and dry then. Looks like Jesus.

But what if this referred to someone else? What if this was David speaking? Tradition holds that he was the author of this psalm. It's in the first-person, so it *could* be David, I suppose. He was also God's King, anointed by Samuel in Bethlehem and set by God on Zion, the site of Jerusalem. Only one qualification seems lacking: Is David ever called God's son? We can turn nowhere else but to Scripture.

If you have your Bible near at hand, I invite you to turn to 2 Samuel 7:12-13. Here, through Nathaniel the prophet, God promises that from David's line will come a descendent who will be to God a son. This son will build God's Temple, and God will establish his throne forever. We should forgive David for believing this descendent to be Solomon. He was David's son, after all, and he was blessed with wisdom from God. Solomon built a beautiful, extravagant Temple for God that pleased God, and his kingly line *did* last as long as Israel remained an autonomous nation. Was God a father to him, and was he a son to God? That certainly appeared to be the common opinion.

But then along came a more worthy candidate. Born from the line of David came one Jesus Christ, who was not just a son to God but was, quite literally, the *Son of God*. Though it was not the earthly kingdom people had been hoping for, God established the reign of heaven in and through Jesus Christ, the Son of David, for all eternity. And the Temple? Solomon's Temple, beautiful though it may have been, proved to be little more than stones and so much precious metal. Jesus, however, declared *Himself* to be the true Temple of God. The Temple is the place where one encounters God. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. It's in Him and Him alone that God comes to *you*.

So, let's return to Psalm 2:7. Who is speaking here? Is it David? Is it Jesus? Allow me a third option: It is both. David speaks these words of himself in partial fulfillment perhaps not even knowing that his descendent, God's great Anointed King, His Messiah, would speak them in even more glorious, complete fulfillment in the age to come. And we, who have been baptized into Christ's death and resurrection, can boldly proclaim that we, too, have been made sons and daughters of God, our Heavenly Father.

Prayer: Father in heaven, you have called us to be your own through your Son's death and resurrection. Empower us to boldly proclaim the words given to us in your Word. Amen.

### A Gift, but from Whom?

*"Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession."*

I like presents. I'm not ashamed to admit it. Who doesn't like getting presents? Sometimes they're things you want; sometimes they're not. But that's not usually the point. What makes a present special is that it is real, physical, tangible proof that somebody else has been thinking of you. That's special. I know it's a cliché, but, even more than getting presents, I love giving presents. Yeah, yeah, I'm supposed to say that, but it's true! Giving a gift gives me the chance to think long and hard about somebody other than myself, to consider what makes them unique, and to ponder what might make them smile. Look at the present God promises to give to His King: He will give Him the nations, the ends of all the earth!

Maybe you've heard this offer before. Maybe your alarm bells are going off. Recall Jesus's time in the wilderness, where Satan tempts Him. In Matthew 4:8-9, Satan takes Jesus to a very high mountain and shows Him all the kingdoms of the earth and promises to give them all over to Him if—and only if—Jesus should fall down and worship Satan. Sound familiar? The devil has hijacked the promise of God! He has twisted God's good Word into something profane and wicked, but Jesus doesn't lose His head. He says, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him alone shall you serve."

This is not an unfamiliar situation to us. How often have we experienced in life the twisting of God's Word? People take offense at this or that in the Bible, and, all of a sudden, what *was* God's Word now only *contains* God's Word, and it is your duty to pick the parts you like and cut out the parts you don't. That is the promise of Satan, and it's a promise all too often believed today.

Look again at our verse for today. Disregard the Devil and his false promises. Make your ears deaf to them. Psalm 2:8 is a *true* promise of God the Father given to Jesus, and it is a promise He gives to you, too. Through your baptism in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and your faith in Him, you have been adopted as a legal Son of God. That means you get the benefits of sonship, namely the inheritance. That's huge! We are citizens of the holy, everlasting Kingdom of God, whose borders stretch as far as the east is from the west! And a geography note for the unaware: that's eternally far. Go far enough north and you'll end up going south, but start walking east and you will *never* find yourself going west. They are infinitely apart, infinitely vast. So, too, is the Kingdom of God. So, too, is your inheritance through Jesus Christ. *That* is a truly wonderful gift.

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, you are our Lord and King. Turn our hearts to you in joyful thanksgiving for the incredible gifts you so freely give to us each and every day. Amen.

## Stay Your Iron Rod

*"You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."*

Have you ever been to a rage room? I haven't, but I get the idea. If you're unfamiliar with the concept, rage rooms are businesses where you pay to really let loose with a bat or some other blunt object on all the breakable things in the room. You just get to *smash!* No doubt, there's something innately childish about this kind of rage. We're trained out of it as we grow, taught to process our emotions in more constructive, internal ways. Pens, not swords. That sort of thing. But there's also something so *right* about this kind of rage. You're angry? You're furious? Hands itching to smash something? Then let's go smash something!

Psalm 2:9 depicts an image of Jesus we're not entirely used to. This Jesus isn't holding a shepherd's crook; He's holding an iron rod, a symbol of authority and kingship and domination. He doesn't hold it idly, either. He is breaking the nations, dashing them to pieces like a potter's vessel. These nations, the "them" in this verse, are all those who aren't in God's Kingdom. These are unbelievers who will be subjugated and crushed by God's Messiah at the end of the age. This is the side of Christ's second coming we don't like to think about. We look forward with hope for the day He will come again. He will usher in the New Heavens and the New Earth, and we will live forever with Him with an existence so perfect we can't even conceptualize what it might look like. That's the hope we have as believers.

But what about those who don't believe? They can't look forward with hope. The second coming of Christ to them is not a good thing. The New Heavens and the New Earth are not promises of eternal life with Him because they won't be welcome in that Kingdom. They will be crushed with Christ's iron rod and suffer the eternal death of His wrath.

Kind of sours your hopeful expectation, doesn't it? It won't when the time comes, but now, in this time of hopeful waiting, we should feel an overwhelming sense of urgency. People have to know! They have to know who Jesus Christ is and what He has done for them! More than that, we pray that the Holy Spirit will work faith in their hearts so that the number of nations crushed by Jesus's iron rod might be as slim as possible. Let this verse light a fire under you! Let it urge you forward on the mission of the Church. We cannot sit idly by, ignorant of our neighbors' salvation. Christ has died for us and redeemed us! He has died for our neighbor, too. Let's share that Good News with them now, so that we can share eternity with them as well.

**Prayer:** Lord, you have set aside your wrath for the present time in order to save as many people as possible through your Church. Help us to heed your call, put aside our own selfish desires, and do the work you have called us to do. Amen.

### O Rulers, Be Wise

*"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 you take refuge in him."*

It would be an understatement to say we live in a troubled political time. Hate seems to be at a boiling point at both ends of the political spectrum. Reconciliation is a byword. Division and rage win the day. No matter who sits in the Oval Office, just about half the country will be in utter shock and blind fury. Jesus's command to render to Caesar what is Caesar's and Paul's exhortation that every person should be subject to the governing authorities fall on deaf ears. We look at the white house and the politics of today and say that there is *absolutely no way* we are going to be subject to *that* authority, whoever that person may be. We've seen the protests. We've heard the hateful remarks. The public square is a battleground, and bodies are literally dropping.

That is why God's Word is so poignant for us today. The kings of the earth are addressed. (We have a president, congress, and state legislation, but it still applies.) They are warned to serve the LORD with fear, to rejoice with trembling, and to kiss the Son, Jesus Christ, lest He be angry. In short, they are directed to God Almighty and told to be faithful. What can we learn from this? First, we need to keep the context of the Psalm in mind: These kings are *not* faithful. They do not follow God or obey His Word. But they should. Second, these rulers *are* rulers. They rule! More than that, their rule has *not* been revoked from them, despite their lack of faith! We need to hear this and we need to believe it. All authority on earth is given by God. It is His to give and His to take away, whether we like it or not. Whom He chooses can often lead to some head scratching, but rest assured. *Everything* is in His more than capable hands. Third, we should recognize that the rulers of the world *should* be faithful to God! The kings in the books of 1 and 2 Kings are declared righteous or wicked not based off of their civil policies but whether they are faithful or not to the one true God.

So, what are we to make of this, when we put all three of these points together? In the face of uncertain times, we want to know! Do this: pray these verses. Pray them, word for word. Repeat God's Word back to Him; *confess* it to Him. Pray that the leaders of our state, our nation, our world, will be wise. They have been put into their positions of power by God, and we should pray that they use the power given to them faithfully. And, if they don't, trust that God will set things right. He always does. And let that last verse be a comfort, because it applies to you. No matter what goes on in the world, no matter what the latest fear of the day might be, blessed are you who take refuge in Jesus Christ, for He has conquered all for you. He is the King above all kings. He is Lord of all.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are the King of Kings, and it is only by your gracious will that those in authority rule today. Help us not to lose sight of that but to pray fervently for our rulers, that they might be wise and serve you in all they do. Amen.