

Why Do the Nations Conspire?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 September 2002

Preacher: Paul Dudley

- [0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 22nd of September 2002. The preacher is Paul Dudley. His sermon is entitled Why Do the Nations Conspire?
- Based on Psalm 2. While the children are leaving you might like to open up your Bibles to Psalm number 2, page 425, Psalm 2.
- We live in uncertain times. You only have to look back over the last two weeks. We commemorated and thought of September 11th, that terrible day when we woke up and saw those towers come tumbling down.
- These are indeed uncertain times. Since that day, September 11th, in the last couple of weeks, we've seen President Bush threaten to invade Iraq.
- The threat of war is all around us. He went to the UN to speak and he spoke forcefully, trying to encourage the UN to act on Saddam Hussein.
- [1 : 22] The nation started conspiring. All the nations are around the world at the moment plotting and scheming, jostling for world power, jostling for position, scheming.
- There's the Berlin Chancellor at the moment. He's anti-war. But he's only anti-war because he wants to get elected. France and Britain, they're all around the place here, trying to jostle position.
- There's oil at stake here. I read a letter yesterday that people just want to know the truth. Why is the President wanting to go into Iraq? America wants to push ahead.
- And we feel very uncertain in these times. It makes for a very uneasiness in the world at the moment. It makes me feel a little insecure, a little afraid.
- You can just hear it in the way that we speak to each other and talk to each other. What will happen? Will we go in? Will it happen this week? My brother-in-law is flying to America next week.
- [2 : 17] He's flying all around America. He's going to New York. He's got to be crazy, hasn't he, in these days? For many of us, we have restless nights just thinking about what will happen.
- How should we respond to this plotting and scheming happening around the world? The great uncertainty that we feel. We look at the Psalm, Psalm 2.
- And right at the beginning, the psalmist, he looks out over his history and his world. He looks at all the rules and the kings and the nations and the peoples. All their plotting and scheming.
- All their grasping for power. World powers trying to conquer one another. Great battles and blood and carnage. He looks out all over it.
- He looks at this plotting and conspiring. His response to it all? He's utterly astounded. How stupid. How vain. Why should they do that?
- [3 : 14] Let's pray. Father, we live in uncertain times at the moment. As we come to this Psalm 2, we ask that you will give us ears to hear and hearts to listen. Father, to your word.

Father, we pray that we will indeed trust in your great king in these uncertain times. We pray this in your son's name. Amen. As you look at Psalm 2, Psalm 2 begins with a question.

Why do the nations conspire and the people's plot in vain? We're not sure exactly when this psalm was written. In the New Testament it seems to indicate that David, King David wrote this psalm around about 1000 BC.

Now, in that time there would have been great political instability at different points. The Babylonians and the Egyptians, the Philistines, the Assyrians, all these nations all around trying to conquer other nations.

The problem was even worse when a new king would come to be enthroned. What would happen when the new king sat on his throne? Would he uphold the treaties that he had? Would he let other nations go?

[4 : 18] Would he show mercy? What would the new king be like? All the powers jostling, jostling for position. The psalmist looks at all this plotting and conspiring and he's utterly astounded.

He sees that it is utterly stupid, all this conspiring and plotting. And he gives us the reason in verse 2 and 3. The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and his anointed, saying, let us burst their bonds asunder and cast their cords from us.

The psalmist looks at all the conspiring and all the plotting and he realises that all this conspiring and plotting is actually a rejection of God and his anointed one.

As the psalmist says there at the beginning. They set themselves up against God, against his anointed. And they declare that they want to break themselves away from the bonds of God, from his rule, from his ruler.

They want to reject the cords of God's compassion. They want to set themselves up as rulers of the world, not God. They reject God and his leader.

[5 : 24] They think in their own power and wisdom and might they can do this. They think in their arrogance that they should be rulers of the world, not God. The psalmist looks at this.

He looks at the power of man and the power of God. And when they confront each other, he says that it is utterly vain, a futile effort. Let's have a look at God's response to the plotting and scheming of the world.

Let's read verses 4 to 6. Here the psalmist looks into heaven, standing at earth, looks into heaven and looks at God's response. He who sits in the heavens laughs.

The Lord has them in derision, that he will speak to them in his wrath and terrify them in his fury, saying, I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill. The first response we see there is the psalmist looks into the heavens and he sees God enthroned there, a mighty God, superior over all the nations, over all the powers.

We see God there laughing and scorning at the nations and all their plotting and scheming. He looks at them like they're kids playing with little plastic men, playing little games.

[6 : 34] God is the one in control, not them. It's like a tribe of pygmies coming to face a giant. God is the one who is in control and he laughs at their arrogance. He laughs at their wisdom.

He laughs at their power. God's second response, the second response we see in the psalm there is that God speaks. He answers them. He speaks to them and he speaks with wrath and fury like a terrible thunder.

God's judgment rings out. What does he say? I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill. Here is God's answer to the world's jostling for power.

God sets up his king on earth, on his holy hill, on his place which God designates. God sets up his king, the great king, the ruler of all.

When we look back in 2 Samuel 7, we see this links back into the promises that are given to David. Where David's about to set up the temple and God says, no, I'm going to provide a king, a son.

[7 : 37] He's going, I will be his father and he will be my son. It links him with these promises here, the psalmist does. Then in the third stanza, the third part of this psalm, the king is described.

And it describes what this king will do. Let us read verses 7 through to 9. I tell you of the decree of the Lord. He 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. Note the way this section starts in verse 7.

I will tell the decree of the Lord. This is the Lord's decree. This is God's work. God is the one who will establish his king. But notice who is speaking. Notice the one who says this.

He said to me, you are my son. The person who is speaking these words, the Lord's decree, is none other than the king in verse 6. It is the king who is speaking these words.

[8 : 37] The king declares God's words. You are my son. Today I have begotten you. The first thing that God declares about the king is that this king is God's son.

Again, reaffirming the promises of David. The Davidic king would come. That this Davidic king would bring peace and establish his kingdom. But notice the special relationship.

The son of God. Notice there that the son, that the king is begotten. This idea of begetting is not a natural process. You don't naturally become the son of God.

But it is a declaration by God of special status. Here is God declaring that the king is his son. We then look at the rest of this stanza.

We see that this king will have dominion over all the nations. This king that God sets up will have dominion and power over them all.

[9 : 34] We see there that the nations are made his heritage. They are assigned his portion. The nations have been brought in under his authority. The ends of the earth are made his possession. It is interesting to note that when we look through the Old Testament we see that Israel and the land, the promised land, they were God's heritage.

They were God's. They were God's possession. Here we see the son bringing in the ends of the earth, bringing in the nations under God's rule. We see that God in this picture rules via his king over all the earth in this picture.

All the nations will come and bow. Look at the way, the pictures that we have here of the way that this king sets up his power. We see there, You shall break them with a rod of iron.

You shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Here we have two pictures. One of them, the nations being broken with a rod of iron. This rod of iron, when we look through the Old Testament, is a picture of one of two things.

One of a shepherd's crook. Look, the picture here is of a shepherd separating the sheep and the goats. The idea of a shepherd caring for his flock.

[10 : 47] The idea of separating them, of caring for them, of removing the danger. The other picture of a rod of iron is a picture of a sword, ruling in might and power.

This is the picture of this king. We see there in the last little part that the king will dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel, like a piece of pottery thrown against the wall and shatters to pieces. So are the nations that reject God and his king.

Out of foolishness. Well, the last section of this psalm has a universal call for all to find refuge in the sun or to be consumed by his wrath.

Let's have a look at it in verses 10 through to 12. Now therefore, O kings, be wise. Be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear. With trembling, kiss his feet or he will be angry and you will perish in the way.

For his wrath is quickly kindled. Happy are those who take refuge in him. Here we see the kings and the rulers called to be wise. Not an earthly wisdom, but to recognise the reality of God and his kingship.

[11 : 54] They are called to be wise. They are warned. They are warned to serve the king. Serve the Lord. Submit to the Lord as a universal king. They are to submit to him, not to each other, or to set themselves up as kings.

This section concludes with a threat and a promise. For those who resist this, those who resist submitting to the kingship of, the king that is set up, those who submit, listen to the words here.

Serve the Lord with fear. With trembling, kiss his feet, or he will be angry and you will perish in the way. For his wrath is quickly kindled. Perish. Facing God's wrath are those that resist submitting to the king.

But for those who take refuge in him, there is a great blessing. Look at the very last line. Happy are those who take refuge in him. Those who take refuge in the king, those who submit to this king, there is a great blessing.

There is a refuge to be found there. There is a security to be found there. There is fulfillment to be found. Fulfillment is not to be found in the conspiring and plotting of trying to create yourself as a world power.

[13 : 02] Fulfillment is found in sitting under the king. The psalm ends and makes it clear that there is no refuge from this king. All will have to face him, but there is refuge in him.

Now, the psalm is unsurpassed for its buoyant and fierce delight in God's dominion and his promise to the king. It is a great psalm, a psalm of great assurance. When we look at psalm 1 and 2 together, for that is the way I feel that many have suggested and I feel as well that it is set up.

Psalms 1 and 2 form an introduction for the rest of the psalms. They go hand in hand together. There are many clues that point to this, that both of them stand there as a gateway to the rest of the psalms.

They help us understand how we are to interpret the rest of the psalms. We see there in psalm 1 and 2 many of the major themes they help the reader to understand what is to follow. In psalm 2 we see here the importance of the king, of kingship, of God's kingship and taking refuge in him.

When we flip through the rest of the psalms, we see this important idea of taking refuge in God, that God establishes his way of refuge, of protection.

[14 : 14] Psalm 46, God is our strength and refuge, our present help in times of trouble. When we look at the laments, psalms that cry out to God for help, when we read these psalms, the lament, they always finish in praise of God.

Why? Because the psalmist knows that in the end the king rules. God rules with his king. God is worthy of praise. We may face terrible hardship at the moment, but ultimately then we know that there is a judge, a king that is to come.

The psalmist knows this. In fact, as you read through the whole book of psalms, the psalm finishes at the end in Psalm 150 with a great psalm of praise to God.

It's like it knows the end of time. It's going to be a great time of praise of God. It was indeed a great psalm. But the question is that remains, who is this king?

Who is the king that the psalmist is talking about here that is found throughout the rest of the psalms, that is alluded to? Who is this king? Well, Psalm 2, like the rest of the psalms, are written by God's people.

[15 : 18] They are in response to God. They model how people were to respond to God. It is full of prayers, praise and laments.

It's full of psalms of instruction. It is believed that the book of psalms was used in worship services as hymns or special psalms that were said at special celebrations or festivals.

Many think that Psalm 2 was written for the enthronement of a king. Perhaps even King David. It was written there or even to celebrate the festival of when a king was enthroned, the new king when he was enthroned.

He would be there in his palace with all his court officials around him and he would take this psalm and he would read it out in the hearing of all, acknowledging God as the king. And at that point when the king read out and he was enthroned, at that point it was thought that that was when the king was seen as God's son, God's ruler on the earth.

But the reality of this is it doesn't stand up the reality of history. For there was no king after David who had universal rule as this psalm talks about.

[16 : 28] No, the psalmist writes this psalm knowing the promises of God, knowing Psalm 2, Samuel 7, the promises that were given to God. He knows these promises, these covenant promises and he trusts in them and he's looking forward to the time when a great king would come.

Sure, David and Solomon and many of the other kings that came in over Israel pointed to the great king that would come but they waited. They waited for the time of fulfilment when the great king would establish his kingdom.

When we come to the New Testament it's clear that Jesus is that king. 17 times in the New Testament this psalm, Psalm 2 is alluded to or quoted in connection with Jesus.

Jesus is the great king. Remember at Jesus' baptism and transfiguration we hear the words from God. What does God say? Here is my son, my son, God's son whom I am well pleased.

In Acts chapter 4 we see that the kings and the rulers spoken at the beginning of the psalm here who plot and conspire against God. In Acts 4 the writers there note that these kings and rulers are fulfilled by Herod and Pilate.

[17 : 43] The nations and the peoples are fulfilled by the Gentiles and Israel for Jesus' death. There they conspire against God's anointed. There they conspire to bring about God's king and they think they've won.

But we see that God uses the cross, Jesus' death to bring about his kingdom. We see in Acts 13 that Psalm 2 is also attached to Jesus' resurrection. We see that when Christ is raised from the dead we see the king going into his kingdom.

Jesus is the first to enter the kingdom of God, the first, the king himself entering his kingdom. Jesus is the great king. Many other times this psalm is alluded to in Jesus' final rule and his judgment and the promise to keep those to the end who follow him.

Jesus is the great king described in Psalm 2. The New Testament takes this picture in Psalm 2, this figure, king figure and helps us to see that it is also the suffering servant, the one who would die upon a cross, the one who is declared to be Lord and Christ in his resurrection.

Jesus is king of kings, Lord of lords. So what does that mean for us now? It doesn't seem like Jesus is in his kingdom at the moment. It doesn't seem like things are right.

[19 : 02] We live in uncertain times. What does it mean for us? When we look at this, when we look at this psalm, when we look at the New Testament, we are assured that we can belong to the kingdom of God now. By taking refuge in Jesus now, by being united to him, by being united by his spirit, by faith, we can enjoy the blessing of God's reign now in our lives.

We can enjoy God's peace, God's salvation, God's justification. We can enjoy these things now by faith. Not only that, we look forward to a great day when all the world will see it in all its glory, God's great kingdom.

What we trust in by faith will be made a reality for all to see. We look forward to that day. When light of this psalm, what else do we know? What else can we say? We can say that we don't have to fear these uncertain times.

We don't have to worry about the plotting and the scheming of the world, the nations trying to set up their kingdoms. Because ultimately in the end we can see from this psalm that Jesus is the one who is king.

The powers, the political powers and all these authorities, they are all going to pass one day. They are only temporary. God looks at them and laughs at them. We are safe in Jesus.

[20 : 16] We have nothing to fear in these days. Third thing, there is no revolutionary reordering of society, no economic system, no means of bringing in God's kingdom other than this way.

God is the one who will establish his kingdom and he does it through Jesus. In light of this, in light of this, we need to acknowledge that. We need to be trusting God. This doesn't mean that we can just live our own way that we want to live.

It doesn't mean that we can just badmouth the governments and not listen to what they have to say because we belong to God's kingdom now by faith.

We are to live like that. We are to live as people who are a part of God's kingdom. Jesus is indeed king. As a child, I had many nightmares. I had many insecurities.

I would sit there at night time and in the dark have these terrible dreams but one of the ones that I often had was of sharks. Being a good country boy, you know, those sharks just seemed terrible.

[21 : 19] We didn't have sharks in our dams. We had a few yabbies but not sharks. These sharks had big teeth and we had little dams. The ocean is a very big dam. I would have many, many nightmares about sharks but above all the one that I think I had the most nightmares about was snakes.

I hated snakes. I hated them with a passion. They scared me. I remember time and time again waking up from a dream being all scared and not knowing what to do and I found there was a place of great refuge.

My parents' bed. I'd sneak through the hallway and open up the door and just creeping under the blanket, just under the edge of the blanket and it was amazing as soon as I crept underneath that blanket my fears just went.

I didn't have any more nightmares that night. It was just peace. I felt secure with my parents there beside me. It was just amazing. It was great. I think my parents were a little concerned when I was still doing it as a high schooler but a great source of comfort, a great place of refuge it was as a child.

Jesus is the King. In these uncertain times He is a place of great refuge, of great security, great peace. So we cry out, come Lord Jesus.