

Psalms 1 and 2

There's a problem in our nation that, tragically, no one realizes. It's not Marxism or Islam, nor is it the economy, nor does it have to do with immigration, or manufacturing, or illicit drugs, nor is it nuclear war or, indeed, *any* of the things that the media continually regurgitate as "existential" threats. Our problem – our *very great* problem – is unrestrained, unmitigated selfishness. Americans are a selfish people. Woke is, at its core, selfishness. MAGA is also, at its core, brazen selfishness. Secularism is pure selfishness. So is globalism. Everything in modern America, its politics, its culture, *everything* has to do with "self." So self-aggrandizement, self-centeredness, self-indulgence, self-interestedness, self-confidence, self-*everything*! We idolize ourselves. And this self-exaltation hasn't merely invaded the Church; it has taken over the Church. The modern Western Church, even our so-called "evangelical" churches, reek of selfishness.

We suppose that we "worship" the Lord Jesus in our Sunday meetings. That's a delusion. Our church meetings are all about "me." Our daily lives, professions of faith in Christ notwithstanding, are in service of self. Our thinking, our values, our motives, our everything, centers on self. We live as if we're atheists, no different than the professing atheists of our world.

The Psalter has lots more theology in it than most readers suppose. We read the Psalms mainly for comfort when that's needed. That's OK. But that's not what the Psalms are there for. Individually, the psalms reflect on Torah, on God and His will, and on lots of other subjects. But collectively, they tell a story. It's a story that must shake us out of our self-centeredness, because the story focuses on what God is doing in His creation. Recent scholarship has recognized that the Psalter was very carefully organized by someone (Ezra?) so that it forms a unity, one that tells a story.

Psalms 1 and 2 introduce the big themes of the Psalms. Let me list the themes: God as Creator, His *chesed*, His Word, His justice and His judgments; our salvation (or deliverance), our worship of God, our righteousness, our love or desire for God, and our sins; the Son, the King, the Gentile nations of the world and the aggressive hostility of those nations against David, Israel, and Israel's Messiah/King, and the suffering of righteous people at the hands of the wicked. These themes incriminate us who claim to follow the Lord Jesus, they show us up as ungodly selfish people. I say that because what concerns the Psalmist is God and His will and His purposes, and these should be our concerns too. We should be obsessed with them. But none of these concerns are ours today. We're too self-absorbed. Let's examine the first two Psalms because these highlight what all the Psalms, indeed, what all Scripture is all about. They are what life is all about.

Look at Psalm 1. Yes, it's Messianic. It is Jesus who fulfills this Psalm. Yet it's there for us, to instruct us in what God's will is for us. And what is that? It's to live, NOT as ungodly people do, but according to God's written Word. It describes—no, it *prescribes*—how to be blessed, and that's by living out God's revealed will. There are no neutral stances. One either receives blessing, and that according to the demands of this Psalm, or one is cursed. It's stark! We're here to glorify God and we do that, not by having correct theology, but by actually living godliness. The "fruit" we bear (and He has made it explicit what's expected) exalts God.

God has identified Himself with His Word, so to desire God's Word is to desire God. The "wicked" aren't only those who hate God and do evil, but include also all who are indifferent to God, indifferent to His written demands. Life on earth, life for us made in God's image, is demanding! There are no short-cuts or work-arounds. We can't escape it. God holds us accountable for how we respond to His Word—that is, by the way we think and live. Justice requires accountability of those who've been given the freedom to make moral choices. And the pattern of our lives portray our choices.

Our great desire, our magnificent obsession, should be God. He's an infinite Being. He's lovely in every revealed aspect. His perfections should thrill us. His will is good, and the desire to fulfill it should consume us. He made us able to know Him. And to know Him is to love Him. The selfish person doesn't know God.

Now Psalm 2. Most people who read the Psalms miss this theme, but it recurs throughout: God is deeply concerned for the welfare of the Gentile nations. He is sovereign, the supreme Ruler over all His human people, not just His chosen ones, the people of Israel. All earth is under God's jurisdiction. Other gods are subordinate to Israel's Creator God. Yes, the Gentile nations are morally depraved. They demand autonomy. They are willfully ignorant of God's will. And they are objects of God's wrath. Yet, God loves them too. Israel was chosen to be a light, a prophet, a servant of God to the Gentile nations so that they too could know and love God and be blessed.

There's a compelling truth here: To be called by God means that we're to have His purposes as our own purposes in life. Israel was called to fulfill the Abrahamic covenant. That call was explicit at Sinai. But Israel didn't understand that. I fear that we today don't understand that either. The Gospel call is a call to fulfill God's revealed will. It's not to indulge our selfish natures with a sense of ultimate security while we pursue happiness according to our own lights.

Psalm 2 is twice as long as Psalm 1. There's important theology here. It's predictive of the work of Israel's future Messiah and King. "Kiss the Son" means to honor Jesus, that is, to trust Him and obey Him. In other words, love Him. The New Testament expands on the meaning of "Kiss the Son."

But the Gentile nations are at war with the Son. They hate Him. They hate God. So (get this!) Israel was essentially called to carry out a mission of suffering, of self-sacrifice for the sake of those who would respond to their message. And if Israel loved God, they would do it. If we loved God, we'd do it too.

Something else: "Kiss the Son" means to enter into a love/trust/obedient/imitative relationship with the living God. It does NOT mean to know *about* the Son. Knowledge is information, and that doesn't create a relationship. Nor does information motivate anyone to do anything. Only love does. "Kiss the Son" means to submit to Him. That means obey Him. Obedience to Jesus is never an option; we're commanded to obey Him—or else.

For the Gentile nations to be the Son's inheritance, and for the Son to rule over them means that there must be a future era when things will be vastly different than they were then or are now. A glorious Messianic era must come to this violent, hate-filled earth. God is sovereign Ruler even over the future! The Kingdom will certainly come. The future Kingdom is the pearl of great price and the treasure hidden in the field which, to obtain, certain ones sold all that they had. The Kingdom—indeed the King!—is the most valuable object in the cosmos, in all history, in our lives; it's worth whatever sacrifice is needed to participate in it. But not all will.

A day of judgment is coming. "Be wise!" "Be warned!" "Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling" Psalm 2 is downright scary. God isn't some benign deity who has only love and good intentions for all His creatures regardless how they live. He's a demanding God and we're responsible to Him. In this present world, God only appears to be silent. He's waiting, waiting, waiting. . . for the day when "His wrath will flare up." But the waiting is purposeful: It's so that all of His beloved humans may realize His ineffable grace.

The Psalter closes with, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord." It is God's great desire that the Son be exalted by all His creation. So God's love is for all the Nations on earth, for all the peoples of earth. God loves all His human creatures. And blessing awaits all, if only they would respond to Jesus. And by responding, exalt the Son. We Christians have been commissioned to take the knowledge of the living Jesus to all the world, regardless what suffering and loss it may entail. That is the express purpose for our existence.

The Psalter tells a story about a King, a new Davidic-type of King/Messiah and his coming Kingdom. In spite of what seems like hopeless circumstances in which there are enemies who fiercely oppose God, in the future God will, thru the coming King/Messiah, gain total victory and reign gloriously at Jerusalem over a transformed Israel and restored Gentile nations. So let's understand something basic (but too easily missed): The Gospel invites us to participate in this story. The Gospel is Jesus—*everything* Jesus. And if we're following Him, we're expected to be like Jesus and to join Him in His on-going work of calling people to Himself and preparing them for the future Kingdom. The world we inhabit, including our nation America, has already been condemned. It's corrupt in its totality. That's the message of Daniel 2 and the Book of Revelation. The terrible judgment has been delayed, however, so that God's salvation grace may be extended to some more people. For a follower of Jesus, evangelistic outreach is what matters. All else is vanity, selfishness.

The two Psalms we looked at here encapsulate the great themes of all Scripture, indeed, of life itself. We must eschew selfishness in all its forms and expressions and allow ourselves to be what God called us to be: New creatures, in Christ, filled with His Spirit, bearing fruit that exalts our Creator God. Selfishness is hideous. It makes us indifferent to God and His purposes. Psalm 1 tells us what kind of person we're to be, and Psalm 2 tells us what we're to be doing in life. Let's be faithful. We have only this one life, so let's make it count for God.