

"Why do the heathen rage?"

Psalms 1 and 2.

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This question opens the second Psalm. It was first written therefore about three thousand years ago. It is not, because of that, wholly out of date, and without any application for today, only interesting as throwing some light on affairs of hoary antiquity. The Bible deals with eternal values, and when it touches the passing things of time it is to disclose the underlying currents that flow in human affairs which do not alter from one age to another.

The word translated, "heathen" is the one that frequently occurs in the Old Testament to indicate the various nations of the earth apart from Israel. A more literal translation renders the opening words thus, "Why are the nations in tumultuous agitation, and why do the peoples meditate a vain thing?" With this simple explanation the words become luminous, and express exactly what any one of us might wish to enquire concerning the agitated nations of today.

The question is not merely asked in this Psalm, it is conclusively answered. Moreover the answer is given with the prophetic *insight* which goes to the *roots* of things, and the *foresight* which carries us to the *end* of things, when the agitation and rage of the nations shall cease. If we profit by this prophetic insight — and especially if we discern the contrast between this Psalm and Psalm 1 — we shall gain much in the way of moral instruction. If we profit by the prophetic foresight afforded we shall not be unduly disturbed though dwelling in the midst of the agitation.

There are innumerable causes of strife amongst the nations, causes which lie upon the surface of things, and which vary from age to age, and even from year to year. The inspired Psalmist probes beneath the surface and discerns that the real root of all is the innate lawlessness of fallen man, the desire to be rid of the restraint which the Lord and His Anointed might impose upon them. This lawlessness is the very essence of sin.

The Man contemplated in Psalm 1 is the exact antithesis of this. He is wholly separate from the ungodly, their thoughts and their ways. His delight and his meditation is in the law of the Lord. The very law, which the natural man finds to be an intolerable restraint, He finds to be a perfect delight. As a consequence He is like a tree planted by the softly flowing river, full of prosperity and fruitfulness — a simile which conveys no thought of agitation and tumult but the reverse, placidity and prosperity.

The Lord Jesus is the only one who ever has fully answered to the description of Psalm 1. He only could say, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work." Since this characterized His life He could speak later in John's Gospel of His own peace — "My peace I give unto you" — unruffled by the storms without. The years of His ministry were spent amidst a whirlwind of opposing and contradicting forces, yet He abode at the very centre of the will of God, with full delight in that will, and in perfect serenity.

Now we are called to follow His steps. His path is our path, though we follow so often with feeble and hesitating feet. We may depend upon it however that the measure in which we find our delight in the will of God, and are marked by obedience, will determine the measure of our peaceful prosperity and fruitfulness.

Why are saints of God so frequently found in a state of tumultuous agitation? Because they are

out of harmony with the will of God, if not in a state of open warfare against it. Only let us delight in His will and meditate day and night in the Scriptures, wherein His will and purposes are revealed, and we shall be fruitful and prosperous.

The various races of mankind, ever since they had existence as nations, have always been in a state of unrest and pursuing vain objects, yet the Psalmist with prophetic vision sweeps on to a moment now drawing near — as we believe — when their raging will reach a climax under kings and rulers of extraordinary genius and power. There is to be a last great concerted rising against Jehovah and against His Christ, with the object of ridding mankind once for all of those bands and cords which they feel to be only the relics of a less enlightened, a less scientific age, and therefore an intolerable check on human progress and glory. A day is coming when the Christian religion will be almost universally regarded as a relic of a darker age, to be no longer tolerated.

This prediction occasions no surprise to any who are observant of the drift so visible in Christendom. *Then* the cry will be, "Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us." That is really just what the leaders of a large part of Christendom are saying *today*, only they express their sentiments in rather different terms. *It is just the modern attitude towards the Bible.*

Many there may be who will pay tributes to the Bible in glowing terms. As ancient literature it is declared to be incomparable. Its maxims, its moral tone, the ethics it inculcates, surpass anything found elsewhere. The Figure portrayed in the Gospels, Jesus of Nazareth, is confessed to be absolutely unique; the life He lived without a rival. Moreover our Authorized Version is eulogized as a literary wonder, a well of pure English undefiled, so that no education is completely rounded off except the student has some acquaintance with it. All this and more may be said, and yet in another aspect of it the Bible may be rejected with scorn.

Whether these beautiful and complimentary things said about the Bible are intended as camouflage we cannot say, we do know however that they often act as camouflage, and hide the stubborn refusal to regard the Bible as any kind of authority. Immediately anyone quotes the Bible as an authority as to the things of God and religion, the modern "kings" and "rulers" of the religious world are up in arms, and empty the vials of their scorn. They accept it as giving an interesting history of the development of religion up to the first century of the Christian era, but that is all. A Luther, a Calvin, and many more besides, might quote it as the supreme authority, and gladly embrace its bands and cords, as also many a believer does today: they wish to be free to reason, and speculate to their hearts' content, and so will have none of it.

So for well over a century the attack on the Bible has proceeded, with the sole object of undermining its authority. It has succeeded all too well with the mass of unconverted adherents of the Christian religion. The increasing lawlessness, the loosening of restraint in morals and behaviour, so noticeable in Protestant lands, witnesses to the way in which the bands have been broken and the cords of the Divine Word loosed.

The attack has not yet been pushed to its full length. It will culminate of course in the apostasy, and the revelation of the man of sin, as predicted in 2 Thessalonians 2 — "who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped." When that point is reached every restraint will be removed, and the only "deity" that will remain will be *man*, in the person of "the man of sin."

Then indeed the nations will be in tumultuous agitation, and the peoples will vainly imagine themselves to be free to work out a glorious future without any restraint or interference. The "raging" of those days may take the form of an enthusiastic propaganda of adulation and applause.

And all this may seem very, very wonderful to those who are duped by Satanic power. To those who fear God it will be very terrible. To God Himself it will simply appear to be laughable.

The Scriptures do not often represent God as laughing. Three times in the Psalms they do so, and once in Proverbs, and in each case the same thing is in view. If men refuse His mercy, if they maltreat His people, if they lawlessly deny Him and His Anointed, deriding His authority and His Word, they will be judged in due season. And not only judged, but cast down in such a way as to make them supremely ridiculous, the objects of derision to all created intelligences. The "laugh" will be on God's side in that day. Divine wrath and displeasure will be then poured out as verse 5 says; and the Son will execute that wrath, as the last verse indicates. Only He will not need to exert Himself. When His wrath is kindled but a little they will perish. The little finger of His wrath will be much thicker than the loins of their combined strength.

The ragings, the imaginations, the counsel that is taken by kings and rulers, all comes to nothing, and God's counsel stands. His purposes are not delayed one hour, and His King is set exactly as intended upon His holy hill of Zion. The word "set" is literally "anointed" as the margin of a reference Bible shows. The rulers and the kings will depart in judgment, the shouting and the tumult will die, and Jehovah's King will be anointed according to the decree.

Now let us put together the striking things concerning our blessed Lord, which greet us as we read the two opening Psalms. In the first place He is "*the Man*" who was wholly apart from the smallest taint of that which is evil, who found all His delight in the will of God, revealed in His word; and who consequently was fruitful in everything, carrying all to a prosperous issue to the glory of God. He was not the negation and denial of God's thoughts as the first man had been. The rather, "all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God."

But secondly, this Man is "*His Anointed*," that is, Jehovah's Christ. He is the One anointed to carry out all the Divine pleasure, and sustain everything in a way that shall be worthy of God. This explains why Satan's malignant hatred is directed against Him, since once he was "the anointed cherub that covereth" (Ezek. 28: 14). Behind the raging and plots of men lies the craft and power of Satan, as the book of Revelation makes so plainly manifest.

Thirdly, the Man who is Jehovah's Anointed is "*My King*." The kings of the earth and the rulers of the last days will have a great overlord - the first beast of Revelation 13. He will be a king of kings, and control the destinies of the revived Roman Empire. Satanically inspired, he will be the type of strong man that will mightily appeal to the mass of men, and so be emphatically man's king. To him Satan will give "his seat" as well as his power, and he will be found on the "seven mountains" of Rome.

Sinai was the mountain characterized by the holy demands of God, and abject human failure. Rome has the seven mountains of human pride and glory, where the king of man's choice will have his seat. Jehovah's King will be anointed upon "Zion, the hill of My holiness." Zion has become the symbol of the sovereign mercy of God which leads to holiness and glory.

We may well thank God that we "are come unto mount Sion," and not to either Sinai or Rome.

And who is this Man who is both Anointed and King? In verse 7 we hear His voice speaking to us, and we discover lastly that He is Jehovah's Son. This is the decree, "*Thou art My Son*." As Son He is the Heir of all things, and well able to make good His title to the earth by judgments.

This seventh verse is worthy of special note. It is quoted by the Apostle Paul, as recorded in Acts 13; and he applied it to the raising up of Jesus at His first Advent. It is also quoted in Hebrews 1: 5, and there it is placed alongside a quotation from 1 Chronicles 17: 13, of words which in the first instance

had reference to Solomon. It is not unusual to find that these inspired utterances, given originally in connection with important persons or things, had in them a depth of meaning which was by no means apparent when first uttered. And further that predictions which in the fulness of their meaning will only be fulfilled at the second Advent, have a fulfilment at the first Advent. So it appears to be here.

Another illustration of the same thing is found in Psalm 89, where David and not Solomon is in question. There we read, "I will make him My firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth" (ver. 27). David was that in a certain sense. Christ will be that in every sense of the word. So in our Psalm He is the Son, acknowledged as such as He is introduced into the world, whether at His first Advent or His second. Being the Son He is the Heir of all things, with the power to make good His title. Meanwhile He is the test for every man.

The hour of His public glory and of the overthrow of all human opposition and pretension is not yet arrived, so a word of admonition is given to the kings and judges of the earth and all others besides. There is still time to tender submission to the Lord and to serve Him. Then though trembling at the remembrance of His might, one may rejoice at the coming vindication and glory of the Son. If any would tender submission they must do so by honouring the Son. "Kiss the Son," is the word; that is, salute Him by way of submission to His authority, render Him the homage that is His due.

No one will do this except they trust in Him. Hence the note upon which the psalm ends. The word used here for "trust," is one which has the sense of "take refuge." Blessed are all they that take refuge in Him. Amazing fact! Before the hour strikes when He will deal in righteous judgment, making good His kingly authority, ruling as with a rod of iron even the remotest of the nations, poor sinful men may trustingly take refuge in Him. It reminds one of the saying attributed to Augustine that, "The only way to flee from God is to flee to God."

Blessed are all that have fled to Him. Do we not know it? If the blessedness was apparent in Old Testament days, how much more apparent to us who live in the light of the New Testament? Let us rejoice in the blessedness that is ours.

And do not let us forget that though He alone fully answered to the beautiful description of the godly in Psalm 1, yet that we are left to tread in His steps. The godliness there described is to characterize us today. We are to be marked by a careful avoidance of all that is evil, and of the evil men in whom these things find expression. We are to find our delight in the will of God our Father. We are to make His Word our continual meditation so that we may be instructed in His thoughts, and in His will in which we delight. Then we too — in the measure in which these things do characterize us — shall be like trees that are fruitful for God, and be prospered in the things that concern His Name.