

## When the Nations Rage Part 2

### Psalm 2 and Acts 4

**Thesis:** The spirit of this world is changing for the worse (to be more hateful, fearful, angry, divisive, judgmental, ungrateful, etc.). But you and I are of a different Spirit. We follow a different way, the way of Jesus. We get to practice learning how to show up differently now, because the rage of the nations will increase as time goes along.

**Text:** Psalm 2; Acts 3 – 4.

Introduction:

The spirit of this world is changing for the worse. It is becoming more hateful, fearful, angry, divisive, judgmental, ungrateful, etc.

But you and I are of a different Spirit. We follow a different way, the way of Jesus.

We get to practice learning how to show up differently now, because the rage of the nations will increase as time goes along.

#### **What do we do when the nations are raging and the earth is shaking?**

The Lord has been speaking to me from Psalm 2 and Acts 3 – 4 during the past months. I want to share some of my thoughts and reflections in *When the Nations Rage Part 2*.

The Book of Acts begins with the ascension of Jesus, the Holy Spirit filling the followers of Jesus, Peter and other disciples making bold, Spirit-filled speeches, and the fellowship of believers who “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” It is a glorious time of the sharing, showing, and growing of the New Covenant in the lives of the followers of Jesus, but we know it was not a smooth, easy road going forward. **Those who wanted to maintain and strengthen their earthly power and prosperity would fight, imprison, and kill Jesus’ followers. Through every threat, persecution, imprisonment, and loss they continued to pray fervently with great faith and live as Jesus had modeled and mandated. Even the possibility of losing their lives would not dissuade them from obeying and glorifying Jesus** (National Day of Prayer Task Force email, 7'1'21, *Declaring a Firm Reliance on God*).

I believe that we are living in a Psalm 2 moment, just as it was for the church in Acts 3 – 4.

- **This is our context.** Nations, leaders, and peoples are raging. And, they are plotting. But note: they are plotting in vain.
- Here is their plan: “Let us break God’s bonds off us.” They are talking about the Word of God. They are talking about the declarations, the commands, the standards, and the ways of God.
- “Let’s break them off us and let’s not be in bondage to God anymore. Let us cast God’s cords away from us.”
- God’s Word to them was like bondage and cords that enslave them. This is how our culture sees the Word of God.

The **opposition of the rulers** in Acts 4 reminded the Early Church of a Psalm 2 moment. (Read Acts 4.)

**There was a buzz about what Jesus did** in healing the lame man through the Apostles in Acts 3. The healing of the lame man at the temple gate called Beautiful provides an example of an apostolic miracle (2:43) and attracts a crowd to hear Peter’s second sermon in the temple area. In Acts, actions often lead to an explanation about what God is doing; word and deed go together.

**We are praying that this year will be a buzz with testimonies of Jesus among our students, in the workplace, in the neighborhood place, and in our spheres of influence.**

And, we are praying that we will use **the buzz of what Jesus is doing** to share (1) what Jesus has done, (2) what Jesus is doing, and (3) what we believe Jesus will do on the prophetic landscape.

- May our testimony be: *“we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20).*
- *May our prayer be like that of the early church: “And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, 30 while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus” (Acts 4:29-30).*

Peter ... [and] his friends are not going to stop speaking in the name of Jesus, and about all the things which God has done through him (Acts 4:18-20). Now of course it is always possible for anyone to claim the name of Jesus, and the right to speak in his name, and **to use this as justification for any sort of rebellion against authority that they choose.** Such claims have a right to be heard, though they must then be judged on their merits.

But the point about this one... is that the people making the claim have already shown that they are living by it, and that it has power, kingdom-power, healing power. It makes the lame walk, just like Jesus did. Paul put it crisply: the kingdom of God is not about talk, but about power (1 Corinthians 4:20). Where God's power is at work to bring real change, real healing, real new life, there the people who are naming the name of Jesus to bring it about can stand up before judges, whether political or religious, and say with integrity that they are speaking for God. It will be costly; that's part of the deal. But it will be true. (NT Wright (2008). *Acts for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-12* (pp. 68–69).

In Acts 4:24-25, the Early Church cites Psalm 2 as the context for the opposition which they face.

I want to share some insights on this passage from NT Wright: *Acts for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-12*.

Psalm 2 begins by questioning, before God, why the nations are in such an uproar, and [why] the rulers scheming and plotting. This question stands within a long Jewish tradition in which God places his chosen people amidst the warring and violent nations of the earth, as a sign of his coming kingdom, the sovereign rule by which he will eventually bring peace and justice to the world. And on this occasion the means by which God will do this is through his anointed King, the one who will be hailed as 'son of God'. To this 'son of God', declares the Psalm, God will give not just the promised land as his inheritance, but all the nations of the world. The promises to Abraham have been extended, as in Psalm 72 or Psalm 89, and now they embrace the whole world.

So when the apostles quote Psalm 2 in their confident, exhilarated prayer in verses 25 and 26 [referring to Psalm 2], they are not just finding a vague proof-text to help them anchor a general sense that all the world is against them. They are calling up a very specific text which speaks graphically and powerfully of the Messiah as the son of God, destined to rule the whole world. Woven deep into the heart of early Christian belief was exactly this note, as we find in a passage in Paul. In Romans 1:3–5..., [Paul] declares that in the resurrection God demonstrated that Jesus really was his son, the Messiah from the seed of David, and that this Jesus was therefore the Lord of the whole world, claiming allegiance from all people.

Praying like this is confident praying, not because people necessarily feel more devout than at other times, but because they are rooting themselves firmly in the ancient tradition of scripture. They start their prayer by invoking God as the creator of heaven, earth, the sea and everything else—the God, in other words, of the Old Testament, the God who can be appealed to for all that takes place

within his domains. Then follows the quote from the Psalm. Then the present situation is placed firmly on the map of the scriptural story which has already been celebrated. As a result, the prayer can acknowledge, as Acts already has, the strong theological point that even the apparently disastrous things that took place as Jesus went to the cross were not outside God's will (verse 28). The wickedness of rulers is held in check by, and contained within, the overall purpose of God, who makes even human wrath turn to his praise.

With the ground thus prepared, the main triple thrust of the prayer is quite straightforward. [Here is what they are not praying.] Not 'Lord, please cause them to die horribly' or 'Please stop them being so unpleasant.' Not 'Lord, let this persecution stop,' or even 'Please convert the authorities, so that your work can go forward.' Rather, quite simply, 'Now, Lord, look on their threats; let us go on speaking boldly; and will you please continue to work powerfully.' The opposition [is] there, and God knows about them. We are here, and we need to be faithful, to continue to speak of Jesus boldly and confidently. And here is the power of God, which is not in our possession but which, because of Jesus, will continue to be at work to set up signposts pointing people to the new thing which is happening through him.

The church needs to learn, in every generation, what it means to pray with confidence like this. We do not go looking for persecution. But when it comes, in whatever form, it certainly [focuses] the mind, sends us back to the scriptures, and casts us on God's mercy and power. The church needs, again and again, that sense of God's powerful presence, shaking us up, blowing away the cobwebs, filling us with the spirit, and giving us that same boldness. (NT Wright T. (2008). *Acts for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-12* (pp. 71–73).

### The offensiveness of the gospel

I also want to address the offensiveness of our gospel and our witness that *"there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12).

[Why is it] that Acts 4:12 has been so unpopular within the politically correct climate of the last few generations in the Western world: 'No other name'? People say this is arrogant, or exclusive, or triumphalist. So, indeed, it can be, if Christians use the name of Jesus to further their own power or prestige. But for many years now, in the Western world at least, the [shoe] has been on the other foot. It is the secularists and the relativists who have acted the part of the chief priests, protecting their cherished temple of modernist thought, within

which there can be no mention of resurrection, no naming of a name like that of Jesus. And the apostles, in any case, would answer: Well, who else is there that can rescue people in this fashion? (NT Wright (2008). *Acts for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-12* (p. 65).

#### **When the nations rage:**

1. When the nations rage, like in Acts 3 and 4, **we are a people who ask the Lord for boldness.**
2. And, **we are a people who ask that God would back up the prayers of his people with signs, wonders, and miracles to the glory of Jesus** (Acts 4:23-31).
3. When the nations rage, **we are a people who recognize the spiritual warfare of the hour and the need for the revelation of Jesus.**
  - a. *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4-6).*

#### **When the earth is shaking, we turn to the Lord:**

1. *Psalm 46:1-11. God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. 2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, 3 though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging... (Psalm 46:1-3).*
2. *Hebrews 12:26 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." 27 The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:26-29).*

#### **In the midst of these challenging times, I want to call us to faith, hope, and love.**

1. May we have faith in our God as he is at work advancing his kingdom even in the midst of a pandemic, racial unrest, and political divisiveness (Psalm 2).

- a. In the midst of the nations raging, the Lord has set his king on his holy hill.
2. May we continue to hope in the Lord, for our God has a plan and future for us and for this world (Jeremiah 29:11).
3. May we continue to love God and love others well (Matthew 22:37-39).

**In the midst of these challenging times, I also want to call us to gentleness.**

[Finding Greatness in Gentleness](#) 9'15'21 Lifeway

The danger of a lack of gentleness was revealed in a [Lifeway Research study](#) prior to the 2020 election wherein most Christians admitted to wanting civility in regards to political matters, and yet were OK with some form of harshness. According to the research, "Around a quarter (26%) say they tend to believe insulting personal remarks made by political leaders who share their ideology toward opponents are justified." Where the world might engage in politics or other subjects with hostility, violence, resentment, or forcefulness, God's people need to deal with sin, truth, and spiritual warfare with the tender, gracious, and compassionate kindness of Christ.

### **Gentleness in Truth**

As Christians who are called to be gentle, we do not turn a blind eye to sin, we do not stay silent on matters of truth, we do not compromise on biblical positions, and we do not cease our warring against our spiritual adversary. To the contrary, far from rendering a Christian as passive and tolerant of evil, gentleness determines *how* we engage in all of these areas.

We rise above knee-jerk reactions. By God's Spirit indwelling us, we transcend worldly responses. By the grace of Christ, we do not respond in our flesh. Instead, we respond with the wisdom of heaven that is "pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere" (James 3:17).

Therefore, as you engage with others, even with the world around you that is seriously opposed to Christianity, do it with the gentleness of Christ. Far from being a sign of weakness, gentleness is the gateway to greatness. For gentleness is a hallmark of Christ. So it should be for His people as well.

**Practice: My Interactive Gratitude Concerning Gentleness.**

Practice giving thanks and listening to the Lord. In this exercise, write the impression that comes to your mind. Start with something that makes you grateful. Then, record your impression of God's response. Next, read the question and write your impression of God's response that gives you peace.

1. Express gratitude from me to God for something good in my life or my day. Write it down in a simple way. *Dear God, I am thankful for...*
2. Imagine God's response to my gratitude and write it down. What might He be thinking, feeling, or saying back to me, especially about who I am to Him?
3. Ask: God, when have I treated someone harshly this week?
4. Ask: God, what do you want me to know about expressing gentleness to that person(s)? (Write what comes to mind.)
5. Consider sharing with a friend or two what you wrote down and what you experienced. Do not explain what you wrote. Just share. Check for a sense of peace (wholeness, well-being) after you read what you wrote.