

The Sovereignty of God (10.9.1986)

by Peter Maiden

The sermon emphasizes the sovereignty of God and His ability to accomplish His desires despite the opposition of the world.

Duration: 1:02:08

Scripture: Psalm 2:1-2, Psalm 2:4, Matthew 6:33, Acts 4:10-12, Acts 4:23-25

Topics: "Sovereignty"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of the local church's support, not just financially, but also through prayer. The sermon focuses on Psalm 2 and highlights three responses that believers should have to the greatness of God and the opposition faced by the kingdom of Christ. The first response is to humbly and joyfully fall before God, recognizing His sovereignty. The second response is to serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. The third response is to trust in God's laughter at the opposition and His ability to fulfill His eternal purposes. The sermon also references Isaiah 46:10 to emphasize God's unwavering plans.

Transcript

A year or two ago, a person flew across from Canada just to come and view this wall. And she flew into Carnell Airport, a major international airport. And she hired a car to drive out to this wall.

And she forgot that in England we drive on the correct side of the road. Now my house, my house is between, my house is between where she flew into and where the wall is situated. And I always parked my car outside of the house.

And at 8 o'clock at night, there was this most horrendous noise. She had actually driven about a mile and a half in England, not realizing she was on the wrong side of the road. And then found something coming towards her on the same side, swerved right into my car.

It completely wrote it off. So that's where I live, I don't know why I told you that, but that's where I live. And working with me there is Susie Buss, who's been helping in leading the singing.

And Andy Thompson, who I think most of you have got to know. Andrew Thompson. And Richard Phillips, who just joined me this year after spending five years in Cyprus.

And I'm married with three children. My father-in-law also lives in the house with us. Now I've been a Christian ever since I can remember.

I was born into a Plymouth Brethren home. And from the very earliest recollection in my mind, the earliest thing I can remember is actually sitting on my mother's knee. I can just remember it.

Being taught the word of God. And I guess I fell into love with Jesus when I was a child. I can't remember a day when I accepted Jesus into my heart.

I can't remember a day when I was converted. Some of you are immediately worried about me, aren't you? There's no way I could be. But I honestly can't remember a day when I did ask the Lord Jesus to be my Savior.

But I know He is my Savior and surely that's what counts. So I grew up knowing the word of God to some degree from my mother's training. And though I went away from the Lord in my teenage years to a certain degree.

I never went far away from the Lord. And by the time I was 14 I was actually preaching. I look back now on some of the notes of my sermons which I preached as a 14 year old and I'm embarrassed at some of the things I used to say in those days.

And in those days I got to know a chap called Keith Beckwith. Keith was a member of my home. And he used to be the British Director of Operation Mobilized God.

And I kept Keith and I considered him to be a very unusual person. A definite tendency to fanaticism in many areas. And one day he brought this guy called John.

And that definitely convinced me he was strange. Companions like that he was definitely strange. And I made a commitment in my mind to keep Keith at a distance.

One day he was visiting Christians in Poland along with a fellow called John Watts. And they were both killed in a head-on motor accident. And his body was brought back to Carlisle.

And a funeral service took place which I look back to as a life changing hour for me. I heard about Keith and I heard a message from George. And the day after the funeral I had to go and visit a very close friend of mine right from childhood.

Keith's father Mr. Beckwith. And it was really that meeting with Mr. Beckwith as he responded to the death of his son which was a true life changing if you like moment for me. I was actually with Mr. Beckwith he's a very elderly man now just last Sunday morning.

He's still standing firm for God and he's probably one of the most fervent prayer partners for the work of Operation Mobilization. Well somehow I got on to the regular letter list of George Verwer and began to get regular letters from him. He had a marvelous gift to get guidance for me.

I found great difficulty getting guidance but he managed to get to use me in around the world. And I managed to resist all these things for a long time. Meanwhile I'd gone into full time Christian service.

I actually used to be a full time open air preacher. I worked for the Missionary Society which has a royal charter from the Queen to go on to most of the race courses, horse racing courses of Britain free of charge

and preach on the race courses. I spent a couple of years going from the Grand National.

I was the youngest evangelist by about 40 years in that team of 12. I remember you know you weren't supposed to watch the horse racing. While the horse racing was on they used to pray together.

To me it's one of the most beautiful sights in the world. So I had this system I always used to open in prayer and then I would leave and dash across the fence. I had to position myself a furlong from the end and as soon as all the horses had passed I can join again.

But there were two years of fantastic training for me. And eventually I joined OM for one year about I guess about 12 years ago now. I joined when a brother left as the British director so I joined as the British director of OM.

And gradually I got more and more linked with the movement and more and more involved in it. That one year has extended to... I can remember sitting in a conference very much like this. It wasn't in a place like this but thinking I got one year to do.

Just one year to survive in this movement. But I look back you know with real gratitude to God. It's amazing how God can take people from a tremendous variety of backgrounds and weld them together for his glory.

That's a little bit about me. I want you to turn now to the second psalm. I want to speak to you tonight about the sovereignty of God.

And we're going to be thinking too of the greatness of God. Because one conviction I want you to go from this conference with is the conviction that our God is great. And I'm longing that it's not just something you sing when you get the words on the overhead projector.

But it's something that you really believe and you're willing to stand on this truth. My God is great. So let's read the twelve verses of Psalm 2. I'll read the first six in English and then I'll ask Ben to read the remainder in German.

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his anointed one. Let us break their chains, they say, and throw off their fetters. The one enthroned in heaven laughs.

The Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, I have installed my king on Zion, my holy hill. And now I want the counsel of the Lord.

He said to me, you are my son, today I have testified against you. Please do not, so I will give you the peoples to inherit and the world to destroy. You should smash them with an iron scepter, like heads should be smashed.

So be understanding, you kings, and let yourselves be warned, you rulers. Serve the Lord with fear and kiss his feet. His wrath will soon burn away.

A very memorable thing for me in recent years was a conversation I had with a Christian mother. She had two children and one day she left them watching television. And she was held up in the kitchen for longer than she expected.

When she went back, her two children were watching one of these television programs which depicted or pictured a nuclear holocaust. And she said that her two young children were just sitting there crying uncontrollably. And when she managed to get them round and get them back to the position where they could just talk normally again, the only question they could ask for the next few moments was, Mummy, Mummy, is it really going to happen? Is it really going to happen? The fear level has really risen in our world in recent years.

And in many parts of the world, the Christian church is under intense opposition today. And it's quite possible for Christians around the world to find their fear level rising. And I'm sure that some of you, as you face the next year or the next years, have a degree of fear and uncertainty in your hearts.

And that's why I want us to look tonight at this truly magnificent second psalm. When it was originally written, of course, it was about fear. It was a boast, a boast that the kingdom of King David would increase and would be enlarged.

The boast was that even though David's kingdom would have many enemies, it wouldn't be destroyed, it would increase and grow. But as you read this psalm, it soon becomes obvious that this is one of the great messianic psalms. It's speaking to us not just of David, but of great David's greatest son, the Lord Jesus.

And it's the great Christian boast that the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ will increase and will grow, whatever the opposition. It is, of course, a Hebrew poem. And it's a poem with four verses.

We'll look at the first verse, that's the first three verses of the psalm. And here we're introduced to the people who will oppose the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we're told three things about these people who will oppose the work of God in this world.

First of all, we're told about the intensity of their opposition. And then secondly, we're told of the unreasonableness of the opposition. And then thirdly, we're told who exactly the opposition will be against.

Look first then at the intensity of the opposition we can face, or we can expect to face, as we seek to build the kingdom of Christ. In verse one we're told of the raging of the nations against Christ. Now that word rage, in the original language, was used to describe the foaming and the roaring of the sea.

This is what it will be like as the kingdom of Christ spreads across the world. Wave after wave of opposition will come against it. Now you know, in England it's always interesting to go on holiday.

Last year I went on holiday to a foreign land, I went to the land of Wales for my holiday. I believe in having two weeks holiday every August with my family. But we got this caravan and an awning, you know, a kind of tent on the end of the caravan.

And we put it on top of this cliff overlooking the sea, beautiful position. And for fourteen days we sat in that caravan. Basically the only time we went out was to go to the loo or to hold on to the awning as the wind threatened to blow it off the cliff top.

I played Monopoly for hours and hours. I've never been so relieved to get home. I was asking my kids when we had a very pleasant holiday in Holland, what they remember about that most forgettable holiday.

Do you remember the night we went down the cliff to the sea? This was the height of the storm. And literally the waves and the wind was lashing. And it really was an unforgettable experience.

To see the great things that the sea could move, the ferocious force of the sea in storm. And that's the very particular word that the Psalmist chooses here. He says as you go out to Turkey or to India or to France or to the inner cities of Germany or Britain.

Seeking to extend the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what you should expect. Wave after wave of ferocious opposition.

Now when you're facing a storm like that, there are pauses in the storm, aren't there? And that's certainly my experience. It's not always intense opposition. There are some times when you don't seem to be facing very much opposition at all.

But that's just to calm in the storm. The next wave is just about to flow against the rock. And notice this wasn't just a storm which happened for a few minutes and then it was passed.

Verse 1 tells us of the peoples plotting against this kingdom. Verse 2 tells us of kings and rulers gathering together in an alliance against the Lord. This is a prophecy of continuous planned violent opposition against the spread of Christ's kingdom.

I wonder if you believe that's happening in our world. I wonder if you understand what you are getting into when you seek to be on the forefront of the extension of Christ's kingdom. You know the last 2,000 years have borne out the truth of this prophecy.

If you turn to Acts chapter 4 just for a minute, you'll see the words of this psalm being used again. Let me just fill you in with the background. The day of Pentecost isn't long past.

Peter and John have just healed that cripple at the beautiful gate in the temple. And they're very concerned that some of the glory for that miracle is going to go to them. So they preach a sermon just to put people's eyes on the Lord.

And it was that sermon which led to the first public opposition since the day of Pentecost against the church of Christ. The Sanhedrin command Peter and John not to preach or teach at all in the name of Jesus. And then you have the characteristic response to that kind of thing from the early church.

Verse 23, they come back to the believers, they tell them what's happened and a prayer meeting begins. Verse 24, they turn to the Sovereign Lord. And look at verse 25, they say, Sovereign Lord, you spoke by the Holy Spirit.

Through the mouth of your servant, our father David. Why do the nations rage? And then you have the first two verses of that psalm quoted. So the early church saw that first persecution as the beginning of the fulfillment of this prophecy.

And by the reign of Emperor Nero, those mild beginnings had indeed become a ferocious rage. You probably know the story, following the burning of Rome in AD 64, Nero was looking for a scapegoat. And he found it in Christianity.

And Tacitus describes the persecution of those days. Let me just read you a very brief paragraph. They were put to death with exquisite cruelty.

And to their sufferings, Nero added mockery and derision. Some were covered with the skins of wild beasts. And left to be devoured by dogs.

Others were nailed to crosses. Numbers of them were burned to death. Many were covered with inflammable matter.

And then set on fire to serve as torches during the night. Now that happened within 30 years of the death of Jesus Christ. The heated raging of the nations against the spread of Christ's kingdom.

And that raging has gone on ever since. There's been ebbs and there's been flows. But the nations, the kings have been raging against the Christ.

So that's the intensity of the raging. But look secondly at the unreasonableness of the raging. The psalm opens with a very important question.

Why do the nations rage? And to that question, no answer is given. And that word, why, sets the whole tone of the psalm. It's a psalm of surprise, astonishment at the senseless rejection of Jesus Christ.

You ask yourself, why do the peoples rage against Christ? Surely, by human terms, the most magnificent man has ever lived. And yet all over the world, people are devoted to destroy him. Why? Look at verse 3. You can see what these people are really upset about.

The enemies of Christ say, let us break their chains, let's throw off their fetters. Now what does this refer to, chains and fetters? It refers to the law, or to the laws of God. Now the enemies of God have always seen the law of God in this light.

They say his laws are restricted. God is trying to restrict our freedom. We'll break through, we'll break away from his restriction.

Now what is the reality about God's law? Well here's God speaking about his law. He says in the book of Hosea, I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. Now that's the truth about the law of God.

He ties us with cords of love and kindness. That's why the apostle John could say, the commandments of God are not a burden. I like the illustration of Dr. J. Adams.

He says, when is a train, a railway train, most free? Is it free when it's bumping anywhere across the countryside? Or is it free when it's running on the tracks, restricted if you like, by the tracks? Obviously it's most free, it can perform most efficiently when it's on the track. This is what the law of God is to us. God wants to keep us on the track.

He wants to keep us at that place where we can get the most from life and give the most in life. His laws are designed to produce just that. But this world says no.

He's trying to restrict us. And they say just as they did in the days of Christ, we won't have this man to reign over us. So if God puts laws about adultery in our sexual life for our good, we'll break free from it.

We'll break every rule in the book. And if God says one day a week should be different, remember the Sabbath day, keep it holy, well we'll get rid of that fast. This is always the way, it's totally unreasonable.

Why do the nations reign? God is tying us with cords of love. Shatter those fetters. Then look fairly briefly at the object of the opposition.

Look at the end of verse 2, it's against His anointed one. All this raging, all this violent opposition is against Christ. Now people whom you face this year who may oppose you probably don't realize that.

But what the Bible says is behind the opposition of men is the spiritual opposition in heavenly places. And Satan and his co-workers are using people on this earth, even when they don't realize it sometimes, to oppose the Christ. Well I can see the coffee shop opening soon.

Let's look at the second verse. That's verses 4 to 6. Because here you see the response of God. Get the picture in your mind, all the nations raging against the Christ, trying to smash His kingdom.

What is God's response? Does He tremble in heaven? Does He feel impotent in the face of such power? Well you can see a threefold response. Verse 4, the one enthroned in heaven laughs. That's what the Bible says.

God treats all the opposition of the world with hilarity. As the Islamic regimes plot, God laughs. As the materialistic, humanistic regimes plot, God laughs.

How great is your God? Do you have this image of Him trembling in heaven? Do you think these great regimes can thwart His eternal purposes? Get Isaiah 46 verse 10 written in your mind. God says, My, I will accomplish everything that I desire. But I want to ask you, are those just words in a book, or is it true? Does it happen? Because all the opposition of the world, historically, has it happened in history? Well, think of the book of Exodus.

Here is the great emperor, the great king Pharaoh. And from his position of great power, he gives the order that every baby who is born to the Israelites must be thrown into the river. That's his order.

He imagines that by drowning the Israelite children, he has found a way to root out of the world the people of God. And then his own daughter is walking by the river. See this lovely little baby.

Picks it up, immediately attracted by it. Got no idea, of course, that this is God's choice to be the future deliverer of the nation. Takes it home.

God's choice of a deliverer is being brought up in the palace of the opposition. And he is being trained for his future work by the person he is about to lead the children of Israel away from. And along comes Miriam, you remember, Moses' sister? She's got a sharp mind.

She says, you probably need a nurse for that child. So she goes to get mum, you see. And mum comes along, and before long, you've got the mother of Moses being paid to bring up her own child, the future deliverer, in the palace of the opposition.

The Lord in heaven laughs. Is it happening today? I think it is. I had this lovely story when I was in Nepal a couple of years ago.

You know, it's illegal to become a Christian in Nepal, don't you? It's a bit of a challenge for the Holy Spirit, isn't it? Against the law to become a Christian. So we see very exciting growth of the church in Nepal at the present time. But I had this lovely story, I thought I'd never hear it with my own ears.

I've heard it, you know, second hand, but I heard it with my own ears. This Nepali pastor, little fellow, who is imprisoned because he's not only become a Christian himself, but he was actually helping other Nepalis to become Christians and having them baptised. So he was put in prison.

But within six months they released him. And the actual statement was, he was much less of a problem outside than inside. Quite a number of the prisoners.

Overrules all the opposition of the nations against his Christ, and he turns it for good. You are going to see this with your own eyes. All the raging of the nations put summarily in place by the risen reigning Lord Jesus.

These are not just words in a book. When the Bible says that God laughs at all the opposition of men. But he doesn't just laugh, he speaks.

Verse 5, he rebukes them in his anger. So the answer to all their raging is just his word, his word. Now we know of course that in the final battle, the battle of Armageddon, the Lord Jesus is going to slay all the opposition with the breath of his mouth.

Here's all the united opposition against the Christ, and they come face to face with him. He slays it. The Lord laughs.

And then just look at what he speaks, what he says. Verse 6, I have installed my king on Zion. Now notice the past tense there.

Here is something that God has already done. Spurgeon writes, Jehovah's will is done, man frets and raves in vain. Here is something that brother Bent probably will not thank me for.

Gods, this is Spurgeon, always hard to translate. Gods anointed is appointed and shall not be disappointed. You can pass that.

But it's a fantastic thought, isn't it? What the nations are seeking to stop, God has already done. He said, I've set my king, Jesus, on Zion. Well we've got to move on to the third stanza of the poem.

And here you're introduced to a third person. Now it's the Lord Jesus Christ speaking. He says, I'll proclaim the decree of the Lord.

Jesus is saying, I'm going to tell you what my father has decided to do. Jesus said, God, my father, said to me, you're my son. Verse 8, ask of me, my father said, and I will make the nations your inheritance.

The ends of the earth will be your possession, my son. So here is Jesus claiming for himself what his father has promised him. And here you have, in my opinion, one of the clearest pictures in the whole of the Bible of spiritual warfare.

Verses 1 and 2, the nations, the kings are raging. Verse 8, Jesus is saying, my father has promised to give me what you are fighting for. That's what's going on in the world today.

It will be happening even as we pray tonight. Jesus is taking from this world his rightful inheritance. He is calling out the people for whom he died.

He is putting together the bride to meet the bridegroom. He's saying, the nations are mine. Wave after wave comes against the kingdom.

But God says, I've already put Jesus in his rightful place. And Jesus says, I am taking what is rightfully mine. And you are getting involved.

Can you see why we believe in prayer? Anybody like to stand amongst that, if you're not sure that you're in God's place? The support of your local church. Do you believe that to be involved in this warfare? Well, let's look at the fourth verse. And here you see what our response should be to all this.

How do you respond to this picture? The greatness of God laughing at the evil ideas of the nations. The Lord Jesus claiming his inheritance. How do you respond to it? Well, the psalmist suggests three responses.

Verse 10, if you are wise. In the light of all you've seen. Verse 11, you should serve the Lord with fear and you should rejoice.

In other words, if you believe all this, if they're not just words in a book, but you actually believe the things I've been talking about tonight. Your only response can be to humbly and joyfully fall before this great King. And you know, I believe that some of you need to do that tonight.

You're coming towards the end of this conference and there are still parts of your life you have. You are resisting his place, his call over your life. What is the sense, what is the point of resisting such a King? Somebody came to me just before the prayer morning began at 10 o'clock.

He didn't want to enter into this prayer day without getting something right with his book. He wanted me to help him find this character in the conference. There'd been something between them for quite a few months during this pastoral meeting.

For weeks, for months, there'd been that part of his life unsubmitted to the King of Kings. You're going to see some of us tonight humbly, joyfully submit. I love the balance of that verse.

Serve the Lord with fear, rejoice with trembling. I hope you've got that balance in your relationship with God. There's a place for reverential, and yet there's a place through Christ, for joy and even for such a closeness in his presence.

And then the second response is there in verse 12. Kiss the son. To kiss was a rite of adoration and worship.

When you kissed someone, it was an acknowledgement of his authority over you. You know when you sing, Jesus is Lord, you're using a very, very special word. The Greek word is translated in a number of ways in your Bible.

On one occasion, it's translated owner. When Jesus sent the disciples to get that coat, the owner of the coat, the owner of the donkey. That's the word kurios, the word Lord.

And when Jesus said, no man can serve two masters. When the Roman emperor is referred to in the book of Acts. Awesome thing, isn't it, to sing Jesus is Lord.

Jesus, you're the owner, you're the master, you're the emperor, you're the ruler of my life. Maybe as we come to recognize his absolute authority over us. Right there at the end of the psalm.

Blessed are all. Who is your security tonight? If operation mobilization is your security, I'll pray for you honestly. Your own church is all that you have as a security.

He's my security. He's my sovereign. He rules my life and all the circumstances.

You probably know how that hymn Rock of Ages was written. What did it do? Augustus Toplady was walking along a beach. And he saw, it must have been Wales, I mean, he saw some black storm.

The storm is coming. He went in, the storm passed, he walked out and there was a playing card on the beach. And he picked up this playing card as he walked along.

And he thought of the coming storm of God's judgment on the world. And he wrote those words. And how we can hide secure from the coming judgment in him.

And you know we don't just hide there for our salvation. We hide there for our daily salvation. For our daily salvation from all the storms and all the opposition of Satan.

Confident in the greatness of God. In the triumph of God. And we'll just pray.

And as soon as we've had coffee, Kathy and her co-workers are going to come up. And they're going to lead us in an extended time of worship. Father, we want to thank you for yourself.

We want to thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you that he is the King of Kings. Thank you that the Apostle John saw him in heaven.

And he was riding a white stallion. And on his thigh, the Lord of Lords. And Lord Jesus, we acknowledge that tonight and we worship you.

And as we think of your greatness, we get very embarrassed. And Lord, I ask you that you will forgive me. Lord, when I think of your greatness, how can I fail to trust you? I want to ask you, Father, by your Spirit.

Vision of my brothers and sisters here. Show us more of your greatness, even as we worship. And teach us, Lord Jesus, what it is to teach.

Amen. Let's be as quick as we can with the coffee.

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