

# Exposition on Psalm 2

by St. Augustine

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*St. Augustine's exposition on Psalm 2 highlights the folly of the kings of the earth who rage against God and His Christ, and calls the faithful to serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.*

**Scripture:** Acts 4:26

**Topics:** "Christ's Reign", "Divine Judgment"

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## Description

St. Augustine preaches on the psalms, highlighting the futility of raging against the Lord and His Christ, as seen in the kings and rulers who conspired against Jesus. He emphasizes the power and laughter of God in response to those who oppose His reign, ultimately leading to their judgment and His establishment as King over His Church. The sermon delves into the eternal generation of Christ, His inheritance of the nations, and the call for kings and judges to serve the Lord with fear and trembling, laying hold of discipline to avoid perishing from the righteous way.

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## Transcript

1. Why do the heathen rage, and the people meditate vain things? Psalm 2:1. The kings of the earth have stood up, and the rulers taken counsel together, against the Lord, and against His Christ Psalm 2:2. It is said, why? as if it were said, in vain. For what they wished, namely, Christ's destruction, they accomplished not; for this is spoken of our Lord's persecutors, of whom also mention is made in the Acts of the Apostles. Acts 4:26

2. Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their yoke from us Psalm 2:3. Although it admits of another acceptation, yet is it more fitly understood as in the person of those who are said to meditate vain things. So that let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their yoke from us, may be, let us do our endeavour, that the Christian religion do not bind us, nor be imposed upon us.

3. He that dwells in the heavens shall laugh them to scorn, and the Lord shall have them in derision Psalm 2:4. The sentence is repeated; for He who dwells in the heavens, is afterwards put, the Lord; and for shall laugh them to scorn, is afterwards put, shall have them in derision. Nothing of this however must be taken in a carnal sort, as if God either laughs with cheek, or derides with nostril; but it is to be understood of that power which He gives to His saints, that they seeing things to come, namely, that the Name and rule of Christ is to pervade posterity and possess all nations, should understand that those men meditate a vain thing. For this power whereby these things are foreknown is God's laughter and derision. He that dwells in the heavens shall laugh them to scorn. If by heavens we understand holy souls, by these God, as

foreknowing what is to come, will laugh them to scorn, and have them in derision.

4. Then He shall speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure Psalm 2:5. For showing more clearly how He will speak unto them, he added, He will vex them; so that in His wrath, is, in His sore displeasure. But by the wrath and sore displeasure of the Lord God must not be understood any mental perturbation; but the might whereby He most justly avenges, by the subjection of all creation to His service. For that is to be observed and remembered which is written in the Wisdom of Solomon, But You, Lord of power, judgest with tranquillity, and with great favour orders us. Wisdom 12:18 The wrath of God then is an emotion which is produced in the soul which knows the law of God, when it sees this same law transgressed by the sinner. For by this emotion of righteous souls many things are avenged. Although the wrath of God can be well understood of that darkening of the mind, which overtakes those who transgress the law of God.

5. Yet am I set by Him as King upon Sion, His holy hill, preaching His decree Psalm 2:6. This is clearly spoken in the Person of the very Lord our Saviour Christ. But if Sion signify, as some interpret, beholding, we must not understand it of anything rather than of the Church, where daily is the desire raised of beholding the bright glory of God, according to that of the Apostle, but we with open face beholding the glory of the Lord. 2 Corinthians 3:18 Therefore the meaning of this is, Yet I am set by Him as King over His holy Church; which for its eminence and stability He calls a mountain. Yet I am set by Him as King. I, that is, whose bands they were meditating to break asunder, and whose yoke to cast away. Preaching His decree. Who does not see the meaning of this, seeing it is daily practised?

6. The Lord has said unto me, You are My Son, today have I begotten You Psalm 2:7. Although that day may also seem to be prophetically spoken of, on which Jesus Christ was born according to the flesh; and in eternity there is nothing past as if it had ceased to be, nor future as if it were not yet, but present only, since whatever is eternal, always is; yet as today intimates presentiality, a divine interpretation is given to that expression, Today have I begotten You, whereby the uncorrupt and Catholic faith proclaims the eternal generation of the power and Wisdom of God, who is the Only-begotten Son.

7. Ask of Me, and I shall give You the nations for Your inheritance Psalm 2:8. This has at once a temporal sense with reference to the Manhood which He took on Himself, who offered up Himself as a Sacrifice in the stead of all sacrifices, who also makes intercession for us; so that the words, ask of Me, may be referred to all this temporal dispensation, which has been instituted for mankind, namely, that the nations should be joined to the Name of Christ, and so be redeemed from death, and possessed by God. I shall give You the nations for Your inheritance, which so possess them for their salvation, and to bear unto You spiritual fruit. And the uttermost parts of the earth for Your possession. The same repeated, The uttermost parts of the earth, is put for the nations; but more clearly, that we might understand all the nations. And Your possession stands for Your inheritance.

8. You shall rule them with a rod of iron, with inflexible justice, and You shall break them like a potter's vessel Psalm 2:9; that is, You shall break in them earthly lusts, and the filthy doings of the old man, and whatsoever has been derived and inured from the sinful clay. And now understand, you kings Psalm 2:10. And now; that is, being now renewed, your covering of clay worn out, that is, the carnal vessels of error which belong to your past life, now understand, you who now are kings; that is, able now to govern all that is servile and brutish in you, able now too to fight, not as they who beat the air, but chastening your bodies, and bringing them into subjection. 1 Corinthians 9:26-27 Be instructed, all you who judge the earth. This again is a repetition; Be instructed is instead of understand; and you who judge the earth

instead of you kings. For He signifies the spiritual by those who judge the earth. For whatsoever we judge, is below us; and whatsoever is below the spiritual man, is with good reason called the earth; because it is defiled with earthly corruption.

9. Serve the Lord with fear; lest what is said, You kings and judges of the earth, turn into pride: And rejoice with trembling Psalm 2:11. Very excellently is rejoice added, lest serve the Lord with fear should seem to tend to misery. But again, lest this same rejoicing should run on to unrestrained inconsiderateness, there is added with trembling, that it might avail for a warning, and for the careful guarding of holiness. It can also be taken thus, And now you kings understand; that is, And now that I am set as King, be not sad, kings of the earth, as if your excellency were taken from you, but rather understand and be instructed. For it is expedient for you, that you should be under Him, by whom understanding and instruction are given you. And this is expedient for you, that you lord it not with rashness, but that you serve the Lord of all with fear, and rejoice in bliss most sure and most pure, with all caution and carefulness, lest you fall therefrom into pride.

10. Lay hold of discipline, lest at any time the Lord be angry, and you perish from the righteous way Psalm 2:12. This is the same as, understand, and, be instructed. For to understand and be instructed, this is to lay hold of discipline. Still in that it is said, lay hold of, it is plainly enough intimated that there is some protection and defence against all things which might do hurt unless with so great carefulness it be laid hold of. Lest at any time the Lord be angry, is expressed with a doubt, not as regards the vision of the prophet to whom it is certain, but as regards those who are warned; for they, to whom it is not openly revealed, are wont to think with doubt of the anger of God. This then they ought to say to themselves, let us lay hold of discipline, lest at any time the Lord be angry, and we perish from the righteous way. Now, how the Lord be angry is to be taken, has been said above. And you perish from the righteous way. This is a great punishment, and dreaded by those who have had any perception of the sweetness of righteousness; for he who perishes from the way of righteousness, in much misery will wander through the ways of unrighteousness.

11. When His anger shall be shortly kindled, blessed are all they who put their trust in Him; that is, when the vengeance shall come which is prepared for the ungodly and for sinners, not only will it not light on those who put their trust in the Lord, but it will even avail for the foundation and exaltation of a kingdom for them. For he said not, When His anger shall be shortly kindled, safe are all they who put their trust in Him, as though they should have this only thereby, to be exempt from punishment; but he said, blessed; in which there is the sum and accumulation of all good things. Now the meaning of shortly I suppose to be this, that it will be something sudden, while sinners will deem it far off and long to come.

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