

# Worship for the Nations

Don Williams  
Psalm 2

Worship for the Nations

1. Why do the nations conspire  
and the peoples plot in vain?
2. The kings of the earth take their stand  
and the rulers gather together  
against the Lord  
and against his Anointed One.
3. 'Let us break their chains,' they say,  
'and throw off their fetters.'
4. The One enthroned in heaven laughs;  
the Lord scoffs at them.
5. Then he rebukes them in his anger  
and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,
6. 'I have installed my King  
on Zion, my holy hill,'
7. I will proclaim the decree of the Lord:  
He said to me, 'You are my Son;  
today I have become your Father.
8. Ask of me,  
and I will make the nations your inheritance,  
the ends of the earth your possession.
9. You will rule them with an iron scepter;  
you will dash them to pieces like pottery.'
10. Therefore, you kings, be wise;  
be warned, you rulers of the earth.
11. Serve the Lord with fear  
and rejoice with trembling.
12. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry  
and you be destroyed in your way,  
for his wrath can flare up in a moment.  
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

## Introduction

The prognosis for the church in the West is not good. Most congregations are in decline with aging membership. Over 70% of all teenagers in the United Kingdom have never been inside a church. Cathedrals stand largely empty. In the US "mainline decline" continues. For example, the Presbyterian Church has lost two-thirds of its Sunday School enrollment over the last 30 years. Like other historic churches, it is no longer able to reproduce itself. New Age Religion, the cults, witchcraft, Eastern mysticism, and the quest to develop one's "own spirituality," have replaced vital communities of worship: loving Jesus, loving each other and reaching out to those consumed by sensuality, materialism, and the idols of our age.

However grim this picture may look, and there are remarkable exceptions like the growth of Alpha, Soul Survivor and evangelical and charismatic churches in the UK and the US, it is just the opposite in the so-called "Third World." There the church is exploding. This has led Philip Jenkins to speak of the coming "Next Christendom," based not in the north but in the south. Huge congregations and vast populations are coming to Christ in sub-Saharan Africa, the Far East, Central and South America. And what is the nature of this faith? It is squarely evangelical in its message, traditional in its morality, Spirit-empowered in its ministry of healing, committed to community and vibrant in its worship. (See Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford, 2002). When we look at the church worldwide, if we can hear it, an anthem of praise is rising to the Lord Jesus Christ, and this is exactly the plan and purpose of God.

Anchored in the Old Testament, Israel was never chosen for herself. Her mission was to be a light to the Gentiles, to restore the true worship of God to the nations. Lost in the Fall, recovered in Christ, the universal claim of the living God to be loved and served is now extended worldwide. We live in history's most exciting period of world evangelization. For example, after the Communist revolution, the wife of Chairman Mao Tse-tung claimed that Christianity is only a distant memory in China. She was wrong. Today probably a hundred million mainland Chinese have come to faith in Christ. The vast majority of them worship underground in illegal house-churches. The gospel has spread like wildfire through the suffering of Chinese evangelists and simple peasants who have often paid in blood to bring their people to Jesus. All of this is prophesied and promised in Psalm 2.

- 1. Why do the nations conspire  
and the peoples plot in vain?*
- 2. The kings of the earth take their stand  
and the rulers gather together  
Against the Lord  
and against his Anointed One.*
- 3. "Let us break their chains," they say,  
"and throw off their fetters."*

David sees the nations in rebellion against the living God. They conspire (Verse 1) and unite (Verse 2) to break off the chains and fetters (Verse 3) which bind them. Rebellion against God's authority corrupts their hearts. Their action plan is to assault the living God and his Anointed One, his King. We can see them marching on Jerusalem to bring him down. Their thesis is simple: to be submitted to God, to worship him and to serve him is bondage. Their revolt, their declaration of war is their road to freedom. This mirrors the Fall in Genesis 3. We are always tempted to see freedom as freedom from God, not freedom for God, his purposes and works in our lives. But we are made for him. We are made to serve him. We think we are made to serve ourselves and we, like the nations rebel.

- 4. The One enthroned in heaven laughs;  
the Lord scoffs at them.*
- 5. Then he rebukes them in his anger  
and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,*
- 6. 'I have installed my King  
on Zion, my holy hill,'*

God's response to the nations in revolt, is, first, to see their absurdity. How can people who are dust stand against the holy God, the maker of the cosmos, the eternal King, enthroned in glory? He simply laughs and mocks their action. But because he has made them for himself, for worship and service, his scoffing turns to anger. His wrath is not an irrational, simple emotional outburst. His wrath is based on his moral character. The nations are to serve their Creator. Their Creator is not to serve the nations. But more than scoffing and rebuke, God speaks. In our rebellion we must hear his Word. What is the message? There is a King; there is a sovereign. Although the nations revolt, God is still in charge. His King, His Messiah, is enthroned, installed, on Zion, the holy hill of his holy city, Jerusalem. He is the one who reigns. The nations don't. They are not to be the objects of their own worship. They are to worship God's King. His reign is the divine answer to rebellion and revolt. He terrifies the nations, because he is the instrument of God's just wrath. Their revolt will be brought down. As they assault Zion, they must deal with God's King, God's kingdom-rule.

- 7. I will proclaim the decree of the Lord:  
He said to me, 'You are my Son;  
today I have become your Father.*
- 8. Ask of me,  
and I will make the nations your inheritance,  
the ends of the earth your possession.*
- 9. You will rule them with an iron scepter;  
you will dash them to pieces like pottery."*

The King now speaks. He reveals the divine decree. God has proclaimed this ruler to be His Son. They live in the intimacy of their Father/Son relationship. The New Testament sees this as a prophetic reference to Christ. His is God's Son by nature. But he is also revealed to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead. (Romans 1:4; Acts 13:33) As the risen Lord, he is the first

born of the whole recreation of all things. He is the Second Adam, the One who triumphs over sin, Satan, and death and reverses the effects of the Fall. He is the one who stills the nations' revolt. They are not destined to destruction. They are not simply to be defeated and cast into Hell. As the Son asks for them, they become his inheritance (verse 8). Perhaps this is the ultimate meaning of Jesus' prayer from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34). Yes, God has his righteous wrath. But his wrath, in Karl Barth's phrase, is his "next to last word." His last word is his word of promise, his word of mercy, his word of grace: "I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession." The nations and the whole creation will be brought back to the will and purposes of God. They will submit to his King and his Kingdom, or they will be destroyed. Either we receive God's "Yes," or we will receive his "No." He will be Lord of all.

*10. Therefore, you kings, be wise;  
be warned, you rulers of the earth.*

*11. Serve the Lord with fear  
and rejoice with trembling.*

*12. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry  
and you be destroyed in your way,  
for his wrath can flare up in a moment.  
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*

With their eternal destiny now at stake, the nations and their rulers are called to surrender. They must lay down their arms. They must submit to the King. With heaven and hell before them, they need to be wise. They have been warned. (Verse 10). And what does it mean to submit to the King? It means to worship. At its heart, worship is surrender. The nations, through their rulers, are called to "serve the Lord (Yahweh) with fear." This includes the surrender of the will and the submission of the heart. In the Old Testament the verb here is often used in parallel with the verb "worship." The New American Standard Bible renders this phrase, "Worship the Lord with reverence." Since he is God the nations are to submit to him with awe. He is holy, he is enthroned in majesty, he is glorious – fall down before him, "face down." David now expresses the double movement of worship – we are filled with fear and trembling before God's majesty and we rejoice and shout for joy before God's mercy. We bow down in surrender and we rise up in joy. (Verse 11) "You fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." (Psalm 16:11b).

Furthermore, we kiss the Son, not his face but his feet. This is our sign of submission. But it is also our act of devotion. As Mary poured out her ointment on Jesus' feet (John 12:1-11), as the prostitute kissed his feet and washed them with her tears, (Luke 7:36-50) so the kings, the nations, and our hearts give up their revolt and surrender with a kiss. Judas' kiss of death becomes our kiss of life as we kiss his feet.

The alternatives are stark. We receive God's mercy or his wrath. The unsundered, un-worshipping heart is the rebellious heart. If we reject the grace of God, all that is left is the wrath of God (St. Augustine): "for his wrath can flare up in a moment." But this warning is, again, in this hour of grace, the "next to last word." David ends with the last word: "Blessed are all who take refuge in him." (Verse 12) As John sees in the Revelation: "Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (Revelation 7:16-17)

### **Postscript**

The purpose of world evangelization is to restore true worship. Rebellious hearts become rejoicing hearts. Paul sees this as the goal of his whole ministry: He tells the Corinthians that all he does "...is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God." (2 Corinthians 4:15) The world is lighting up with worship. Cold, hard, rebellious hearts are receiving the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. As a result they are recovering their destiny. They are becoming thankful once again. Their gratitude and praise overflows and God receives the glory. He is the point of it all- our evangelism, our church planting, our worship and our lives in surrender to him. The nations are laying down their arms of revolt and raising their arms in worship – to the glory of God.