

Heaven's Anthem

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Preacher: Ian Naismith

[0:00] Good afternoon everyone, as Paul said, I'm Ian and I'm delighted to join in the welcome you've already had at our Oly's service this morning. I want to start with a short quiz, test your memories a bit maybe, and our quiz is about national anthems.

Now most of us who are certainly interested in sport would recognise the tunes of quite a few national anthems. But alongside tunes, most and not all of them also have words, words that are designed to stir us up, to fill us with patriotic pride, and perhaps to strike fear into the hands of our opponents.

But in practice, certainly if you're a Brit, you probably don't know much more than the words of the first verse of your own national anthems. So we're going to have a quiz about national anthems, and you have to identify which country's national anthem it is.

No prizes, just shout out the answers. As a clue, all of them are associated with people in this church. People in this church who come from all the countries that we're going to put up on the screen.

So here's the first one. Blessed with victory and peace, may the heaven-rescued land praise the power that hath made and preserved us and nation. Any idea of what country that is national anthem of?

[1:13] If we don't get this one, we're going to be really striking later. Any thoughts? Any thoughts? Okay. It's the Star Spangled Banner.

It's the anthem of the United States. Second one. God bless us, your children. God, we ask you to protect our nation, intervene, and end all conflicts.

I'm not sure the people from that country are here. Anyone? Okay. South Africa. South Africa. It's the Rainbow Nation part of the national anthem of South Africa.

Translated to English. South African anthem is in about four different languages, I think. This is one of the parts of the verse translated to English. Okay. Number three. We swear to set free the land of our birth.

United for God. Who can overcome us? I don't think anyone knows their national anthem. That's an Italian one. A rising tune, but it's several verses in.

[2:19] Right. Hope we get this one. O Lord, our God, arise. Scatter her enemies and make them fall. UK, yes. At least someone knows the second verse of the UK anthem.

Right. That was just a bit of fun. But I want to think about what could be thought of as a Jewish national anthem. Say, Psalm 2. If you are living in the few hundred years before Jesus was born, then Psalm 2 has many of the same kind of features as the anthems we've been thinking about.

If you are noticing the words, rather than just think what country they were, all of the words that we put up were countries saying, God is on our side and we will be victorious in one way or another.

And that very much is what Psalm 2 is about. It's saying God is on the side of his people and his king, king of Israel, and we will be victorious through him.

It's a psalm of victory. It's also, like Psalm 1, an introduction to the book of Psalms. Psalm 1 and Psalm 2 may originally have been just one psalm.

[3 : 25] You notice Psalm 1 starts with, blesses the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked. And Psalm 2 ends with, blessed are all those who take refuge in him. And these two verses bracket the two psalms.

They may have been one to begin with. But there are significant differences between Psalm 1 and Psalm 2. Psalm 1 is very much about me and my relationship with God.

It's about the individual, the man who walks in God's ways. Psalm 2 is very much more about the nation. Nations as represented by kings and by rulers. But it's more of a corporate psalm about the people of God and about the enemies of God.

Psalm 1 is very much my relationship with God. It is walking in God's way. It is recognizing God. Psalm 2 is about my relationship with the king.

The king of Israel, we'll think about in a few minutes what it originally meant. For us, looking forward, Jesus, our king. And then Psalm 1, as we look forward, as we think of a New Testament context, Psalm 1, as Graham presented to us last week, Jesus is the perfect example of someone who lives like Psalm 1, what Graham called Mr. Psalm 1.

[4 : 41] If we want to know what it's like to live the way that the psalmist tells us to, we look at Jesus and he shows that perfectly. Psalm 2 much more directly points forward to Jesus himself.

And tells us that Jesus is the one whom we have to worship and we have to serve. It's the first of what are quite often called the Messianic Psalms. There are quite a number of them scattered through the book of Psalms.

There are songs that look forward, when we look back at them as Christians, we can see these are about Jesus. And that's not just us thinking that or putting two and two together.

Psalm 2 is quoted many times in the New Testament as referring to Jesus. So although there was an original context, which we'll cover briefly, when we look at Psalm 2 as Christians, as those who know the Lord Jesus, we look back and see we can see a lot about Jesus in this psalm.

He's pointing forward to him as the ultimate king, as the ultimate one who is the Son of God. And let's bear that in mind as we go through it.

[5 : 50] Now Psalm divides up very easily. There are four paragraphs of three verses each, or perhaps four verses because it's a song, four sections of three verses each that we can look at.

And to make things easy to remember, I've got a heading for each that begins with R. So the first three verses are about rebellion. There's a picture here of nations rising up against God's king and of trying to overthrow him and to win their freedom.

Now some people think Psalm 2 originally was a coronation psalm. That it was one that would have been sung when a new king, perhaps Solomon, or perhaps one of the later kings, when a new king was crowned. And as there's always lots of pomp and ceremony to coronation, this might have been one of the songs that was sung.

And that might be quite relevant as we think about these verses. One thing that sometimes happens when there's a new king in one of the powers of the world is that those who are under that power and perhaps resent it think, here might be an opportunity for us to win our freedom.

The old king has been very powerful and has trodden us down, but this new king might not be as strong. We can take our chance and see if we can defeat him and win our freedom.

[7 : 08] In a slightly more everyday context, sometimes when children at school get a new teacher, they think, let's just test them out and see how far they'll go. Let's be a little bit naughty and see if they clamp down on it or see if they're a bit more lax than our previous teacher and we can take advantage of that.

That's possibly the kind of thought that's here. New king, new opportunities for those who oppose him to rebel and to take their stand against him.

But the psalmist says, why do they do that? Because it's pointless. They're never going to be victorious against the great king who God has appointed.

There's a big difference between this anthem, we teach us that, and most national anthems. Most national anthems, we hope God is on our side and we sing in some assurance that God's on our side. When it came to the Jewish nation, they knew that they were God's special people and that if they were obedient, they would be triumphant.

When we come to the Lord Jesus, we know that he is God's son and that God will put everything under his feet. So standing against him ultimately is futile.

[8 : 22] In the New Testament, right at the beginning of the book of Acts, there was a time of persecution. And Peter and John were thrown into prison and were eventually released.

And the disciples got together and they had a big prayer meeting. It was a wonderful prayer meeting. At the end of it, the whole building shook. But as part of that prayer meeting, they quoted these words from Psalm 2.

Why do the nations conspire and the people plot in vain? And they said this, Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed.

So they looked at Psalm 2 and they said, Ultimately, it's about people who are conspiring against Jesus. And they knew that ultimately they wouldn't be successful.

So how can we translate that to our day? Well, there are many places in the world today where if you're a Christian, you're in great danger. And our brothers and sisters in many foreign lands could probably take these verses and they would be very real to them because they see their rulers conspiring against the Christian faith and against the Lord Jesus.

[9 : 36] Countries like North Korea, China still to some extent, countries in the Middle East, a lot of places where Christians, if they take a stand for Jesus, feel that they're in real danger.

Now, we probably don't feel that. I don't think any of us worries too much about physical violence against us if we take a stand for the Lord Jesus. But yet in our country, there is still an undercurrent against Christian things.

I was really encouraged by what Scott said earlier about that atheism hasn't got the same hold that it used to among many students. But there's no doubt that there is still, among particular people, what they call the new atheists, there is a real hostility to Christianity and a tendency to mock it and to say it's irrelevant and we should do away with it and have nothing to do with it.

It's not persecution in the sense that our brothers and sisters in other countries experience, but nevertheless, it is people conspiring against Jesus and against the gospel and seeking to bring it down.

It's really good to know in these circumstances that we have a God who is all-powerful and that ultimately he will prevail and that Jesus is the only one who can bring real peace and real satisfaction in life.

[10 : 57] So there's a rebellion to begin with. I've got verses 3 to 4 to 6, reaction. So God sees this rebellion and he reacts against it perhaps in a surprising way.

He laughs. I don't often think, I suspect, of God laughing, but it is, I think, the thought here that the suggestion these people are making is laughable.

That would be quite a good expression we would use in our land today. It is laughable that they should think that they could stand against God and against his chosen people and that they could emerge victorious.

There's a good Scots expression that might slightly describe what God's reaction would be. You and whose army? Someone tries to come against you. You and whose army is going to beat me? Or this evening we'll be looking at the story of David and Goliath.

Nilo will be taking us through that. You remember when David came up against Goliath? Goliath's reaction was, am I a dog that you come to be with sticks? He thought there was no chance that David could beat him.

[12 : 02] Now Goliath was wrong. But God is absolutely right. As he sees the people coming and opposing him, he knows that ultimately he will be triumphant.

But it goes beyond laughter and scoffing. And God then rebukes them. He terrifies them, says the psalmist. And then he installs his king on Zion.

So God says to these people, my reaction, there's no way you're going to end up victorious. And you're going to have to consider the consequences of what you're doing.

I have installed my king and he is going to be the one who is my judge. Now for these three headings, I've got a verse from the book of Acts that we're going to look at. And the next verse is something that Paul said.

Paul, when he went to Athens and he saw everything was happening there, preached a great sermon up on Mars Hill talking about the greatness of God. but his nearness to us.

[13 : 04] And then he talks about the Lord Jesus. And he says of God, he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.

That if we're looking forward is not explicitly there, but that is what this means when it says, I've installed my king on Zion, my holy hill. God has set a day when we will all have to give account of ourselves before Jesus.

And he is the one who will be the ultimate judge. And how we will be judged will be on our response to him and whether our trust is in him as we'll see as we go down through the psalm.

So there is reaction. Our third R is recognition. Now, important to note at this point in the psalm, the speaker changes.

So there's been a bit of God speaking in verse 6, but mostly it's been the narrator up to now. In verse 7, it changes to the king speaking.

[14 : 05] So we might like to think of it as Jesus speaking, but only speaking very briefly and then quoting the words of God to him. So these verses, verses 7 to 9, are about the recognition that God gives to the king.

To the king in Old Testament times to the king, Jesus. In the book of 2 Samuel, David is the king and he wants to build a temple for God and God says, no, it's not your job because you've been a man of war.

It's your son who will become the king. But he also says, I will be his father and he will be my son. And that's very much the thought that's here if we look in the Old Testament context that God has used the king almost as an adopted son as his representative here on earth.

But of course, as we look forward, as we think about the New Testament, the Christian context, we think of Jesus as the son of God. Many times through the Gospels, Jesus is referred to as the son of God or God indeed speaks from heaven and says, this is my son with whom I am pleased.

And so these verses very much point forward to Jesus. These three verses are quoted, I think, six times in the New Testament. One of them we read earlier, what Kat read to us, and here's a few couple of verses from that passage, following when it says that God has called Jesus' son, or before that, rather, we tell you the good news what God has promised our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus.

[15 : 50] And then he quotes from Psalm 2. In the book of Hebrews there are two quotations of the reference to Psalm 2 of God's son, and one is presenting him as being so much more powerful than the angels, that none of the angels were ever called God's son, and the other is in connection with him being the great high priest, the one appointed by God for the priestly function, and the writer quotes from Psalm 2 there as well.

So we come today and we have a God who has very clearly identified for us and recognized the Lord Jesus as his son, as the one who is his representative and who always does what he wills, and the one to whom, as it says here, he has made the nations his inheritance, the end of his earth, your possession.

Or as Jesus put it, all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. And then at the end in verse 9, there's the bit about the rule, the authority, the judgment of Jesus.

You will rule them with an iron scepter, you will dash them to pieces like pottery. This picture of ruling with an iron scepter is referred to three times in the book of Revelation, all of them arguably about Jesus, one or two of them may not be, but certainly it is relevant here.

Now it's quite interesting if you look at the root meaning of the words here, the word that is translated rule can also mean shepherd. And the word that's translated iron scepter, some people think has the picture not of a kind of big iron rod, but actually of a shepherd's crook.

[17 : 34] So although there's an element of judgment here, and of God standing against his enemies and condemning them, there's also an element of Jesus as the shepherd, as the one who lovingly looks after and disciplines his sheep.

And for those of us who know Jesus, that discipline is an important part of our lives and the way that he shepherds us. But for those who don't know him, again, it's something that should, the psalmist says, strike fear into them because he is the ruler, he is the one who will judge.

And then finally, let's look briefly at verses 10 to 12. And in these verses, the psalmist urges reflection. Think about everything that's been said up till now, reflect on it, and you're not going to want to rebel if you really think about it seriously.

The only wise thing to do is to recognize the Son and to pay allegiance to him. Therefore, you kings, be wise, be warned, you rulers of the earth, serve the Lord with fear, rejoice with trembling, kiss the Son.

The idea of kissing the Son is really of submission, of submitting to the will of the Son. Let's look at another verse from the book of Acts. Sorry, that's come a bit off the screen at the bottom there, but hopefully you can see it.

[19 : 05] Paul is in Philippi, he's been in prison with Silas, his companion, the prison doors have burst open, the prisoners are all in theory free, although all of them stay, the jailer comes in and he's about to kill himself, Paul says, don't do that, we're all here, and he says, what must I do to be saved?

And Paul says, believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. And that is the New Testament equivalent, I think, of verse 12, blessed are all who take refuge in him.

So the psalmist says, there's a judgment to come, but if we take refuge in the Son, in the King, as we think of it, in Jesus, then there will be salvation, there will be forgiveness, we won't face the wrath of God.

And that's the ultimate message, I think, of Psalm 2. It's a psalm that presents the power of God, how futile it is to rebel against God ultimately.

It presents to us the judgment of God, that God has to punish those who rebel against him, and will ultimately crush them. But it's a psalm about the love of God, and the way in which God has prepared a way for us to have peace with him, and to be forgiven.

[20 : 23] And that is through the Lord Jesus, particularly through his death for us on the cross, as he went there, and as he took the punishment for our sins. As we read again, it was in Acts chapter 13, was it the one who has died, and the one who has risen again, and the one whom the God has pronounced as his son.

So let's finish by returning to anthems. Not national anthems this time, but let's think about heaven's anthem. Now I'm sure there are many psalms, songs in the Bible that we could think of as suitable anthems for us as Christians, are many of the songs we sing that have been written by godly people that present the truths of the gospel and of the Lord Jesus in wonderful and stirring ways.

Let me just talk about three things that perhaps we should have if we have heaven's anthem. And the first thing is allegiance to the sun.

That is what the psalm is about, and that is what we are about as a church. It is about Jesus. It is about knowing Jesus. It is about loving him.

It is about trusting in him. It is about following him. And we, I'm sure all of us, if we know Jesus, would wish to express that allegiance to him and to demonstrate it to others.

[21 : 46] And there's a challenge if you don't know Jesus, if you don't feel your allegiances to him this morning, to recognize that you need to put your trust in him and to come to him for forgiveness and to know that his death on the cross is enough to cover over all your failure.

So allegiance to the sun is a key part of heaven's anthem. Second thing which is a key part, key part of Psalm 2 and of many other passages of Scripture is the warning of judgment.

We need, if we're believers in the Lord Jesus, to be aware that there is a judgment. It's something that will happen and we need to be telling people about it but telling them about it in the context that we have a loving God who sent his son to die on the cross and we can have forgiveness through him.

We can have the knowledge that we have eternal life, that we're going to be with Jesus, that ultimately we have been saved from the punishment for all the wrong we've done.

The warning of judgment is a very important part of what we want in an anthem about our faith. And then the final thing is the confidence in victory.

[22 : 57] We should look at a Psalm like this and we should give thanks that we have a God who is all-powerful, who is in control of the universe, who is holy but who is loving as well and who will give us the victory through the Lord Jesus.

And let's go away rejoicing in that this morning. That as we face difficulties in life, perhaps as we face in some measure opposition to our position as Christians, that we are on the side of victory.

We know the Son, we love him and we know that ultimately he will triumph. And let's go away rejoicing in him and confident that through him we will emerge victorious.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for this wonderful Psalm. We thank you for the way in which it presents to us your greatness, that you are the Almighty One, that you are the one who is all-powerful.

We thank you too as it presents to us our failure and the failure of many, many people down the years, that we, in a real sense, are or have been the rebels that the Psalmist talks about.

[24 : 11] But we thank you that it tells us too that through the Son there is peace, there is forgiveness, there is a relationship with the great God of heaven.

Help us all to put our trust in Jesus, to come to know him for ourselves and then to go on victorious, to serve him, to tell others about him and to live for him in every aspect of our lives.

We thank you for your word to us this morning. We thank you for what we thought about earlier on too. We pray again for the students at the universities around our city that you will help them to be good witnesses and to know the power of the Lord Jesus and the victory that comes through him.

We give you our thanks and commit ourselves to you now in Jesus' name. Amen.