

# Why Do the Nations Rage?

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Psalter 261

Scripture: Psalm 2

Psalter 266

Psalter 3:1–2

Psalter 3:3–4

Jesus is the King. God the Father says that He has set His King, as we read in Psalm 2, upon His holy hill of Zion. We read in Zechariah 9:9, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee.” And Gabriel said to Mary, “The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever” (Luke 1:32–33).

Christ is supreme King. He shall have dominion over land and sea. To Him are the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Of His kingdom, there is no end. And He is King over all creation. He is King over His people; He is the King of grace, the King of glory. He is King in the inward life, and He is King over the outward life. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Every kingdom of this earth has been brought to naught—the Assyrian kingdom, the Persian kingdom, the Roman kingdom, the Egyptian kingdom, the Grecian kingdom. One day, the present kingdom of the United States of America as a world power shall come to an end. But of this King and of this kingdom we read it shall never end.

Thus, it is of this King that you and I must be made willing subjects in the day of His power. We must learn

what it means to bow before Him because His kingdom has eternal consequences for every one of us. This King invites and calls us to enter into His great kingdom. This King tells us the way of entrance: “Ye must be born again” (John 3:7). This King calls us to seek Him while He is yet able to be found, to call upon Him while He is yet near. He commands us to believe in Him and to bow before Him. This King tells us that if we reject His work, His person, His invitation, we reject Him and we reject His salvation.

However, though no one can avoid this King, mankind does not receive Him. Though He made the world, the world does not know Him (John 1:10). The human race is on a collision course with their rightful Sovereign, and if we do not repent of our treason, His justice will crush us. But if we put our trust in Him, then we will be blessed by God and happy forever. In Psalm 2, we learn the gospel, or good news, of the kingdom, which raises the thematic question, “Why do the nations rage?” Under this theme, we will see that Psalm 2 tells us about man’s rebellion, Christ’s reign, and the sinner’s refuge.

### **Man’s Rebellion**

Consider verses 1–3: “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.” “Heathen” means the nations of this world. God’s “anointed” is His chosen king from the family line of David (Ps. 18:50). Therefore, Psalm 2 is teaching us that all the nations of this world reject the Lord and rebel against His anointed King. It is not a matter of bad behavior, but of the thoughts and purposes of their hearts. Whereas the blessed man of Psalm 1 delights in God’s law and meditates on how he can obey it, the accursed nations hate

God's law and meditate on how they can overthrow it.<sup>1</sup> In other words, mankind hates God and Christ.

The apostle Paul wrote the following about all people who lack the Holy Spirit: "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:7–8). Sin is a "turning aside from the law of God," as William Ames said, whether in who we are or what we do.<sup>2</sup> Our inner desires and will have become corrupted by Adam's fall so that "spiritual and true goods taste bad," and "evil things...seem the most gratifying."<sup>3</sup> At its core, sin is a hatred ("enmity" is the attitude of an enemy) against God rooted in a refusal to believe His word.

If this conclusion seems extreme, remember that it is the teaching of Jesus Christ. He said in John 15:18, 23, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.... He that hateth me hateth my Father also." Men, women, and children love the darkness of sin and hate the holy light of Christ—until God works salvation in them (John 3:19–21).

Christ not only revealed the world's hatred for God, but Christ also experienced it personally. In Acts 4:24–27, the early church quoted man's rebellion in Psalm 2 and applied it to how "both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel" treated Jesus Christ. If ever you wonder how the world views God, consider how

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1. The same Hebrew word (*hagah*) for "meditate" (Ps. 1:2) is used for "imagine" (Ps. 2:1).

2. William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 13.2; 14.2 (120–21).

3. William Ames, *A Sketch of the Christian's Catechism*, trans. Todd M. Rester, *Classic Reformed Theology 1* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 18.

it handled His Son. When God became a man and lived among us, we crucified Him and mocked Him as He died.

We should not be shocked, then, when we see the world rebelling against God's good and righteous laws, wallowing in moral filth, bowing before ridiculous idols, attacking Christ's holy church, and destroying human life in every way. Man's rejection of God spawns a host of evils: sexual immorality, pornography, homosexuality, malice, greed, envy, murder, lies, gossip, pride, boasting, disobedience to parents, cruelty—and all this while cheering others on in their sins though we know that God outlaws it all (Rom. 1:21–32). We should marvel that God's common grace holds back so much of this evil so that civil society can continue to exist and the gospel go forth in some measure of peace.

Oh, what need we have to really see and know ourselves, to know that we hate God. Those are strong words, but apart from saving grace, we have a strong, evil heart. Are not these words really true? When it comes to a test between God and you, whom do you pick? Do you not pick yourself? Is that not hating God? When God's providence cuts across your hopes and ambitions, how do you respond? Is it not with resentment? Is that not hatred against God? We are haters, enemies of God. The bent of our nature is to hatred. Only grace makes it different. The bent of our nature is always to say, "Lord, let my will be done," not "Thy will."

The unfathomable truth is that for such corrupt enemies and rebels God still sends His gospel of love, grace, and mercy. But as He sends the gospel, He usually probes our hearts with the law. He comes and asks each one of us, "Is your heart set against God? Are your thoughts and purposes striving after a vain and empty thing? Do you love God's Word, or regard it as a chain that enslaves you to a tyrant? Are you yet a sinner in need of salvation?"

Who is this King that the world so hates? Who is this ruler that the world thinks is worthy of no obedience whatsoever? Is it some evil beast that commits moral atrocities against his people? No. This hated King is none other than Jesus Christ, the Lord's anointed.

### **Christ's Reign**

Jesus Christ is the King of the world. We see Christ's reign in the heart of verses 4–9. The first part of this section speaks of God's absolute sovereignty, victorious wrath, and appointed King. The second part of this section speaks of God's promises to His Son.

#### *The King Appointed by the Absolute Lord*

Look first at verses 4–6: "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." For God to sit enthroned in the heavens means that He is the supreme and sovereign Lord over all. God is not anxious, though the whole world rages against Him, but laughs at His puny enemies. The words "vex them in his sore displeasure" can be translated, "terrify them in his wrath."

God does not worry about polls. He is not concerned when the world is against Him. His mere rebuke can shake the powers of this age. Therefore, let God's people not fear the face of man. Certainly, we must honor civil authorities and not mock them, for we are not the sovereign Judge, but mere men under the institutions that God ordained (Rom. 13:1–7). However, though we honor authority, let us never think too highly of man, whose breath is in his nostrils, for on the day of the Lord all pride of man will be cast down (Isa. 2:12–22).

This text reminds us of God's omnipotence. "Omnipotence" comes from the words "omni," meaning "all," and "potent," meaning "power." Thus, "omnipotence" means *all power*. God creates all things by the free act of His omnipotent will so that not only we but all creation came into existence through the sovereign will of God. He speaks and it is; He commands and it stands firm (Ps. 33:9). By that same omnipotent power, God's plans never fail and He frustrates the evil schemes of sinners (vv. 10, 11). If you stop and think about this, it is an awesome thought that every movement we make, every thought we think, every moment of health we have, every breath we take, is God's powerful act of upholding and ruling His creation. There is nothing that happens by chance.

The omnipotent God overthrows the wicked plots of mankind by appointing His own King to rule the world: "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion" (Ps. 2:6). Zion represents the holy presence and mighty kingdom of God. God has entrusted to Jesus Christ the right as Mediator to rule, defend, and advance God's kingdom in every respect. Though individual churches and Christian organizations may fail and nations may fall under God's judgment, Christ's kingdom cannot fail. This can give us great confidence as we serve Him.

The Reformed forefathers used to speak of three dimensions of Christ's kingship. They spoke of His *kingdom of power*, for when He rose again and was about to ascend on high, He said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). He rules over the whole universe as King of power, over heaven, over earth, and yes, even over hell. Theodorus VanderGroe explained, "He therefore governs all His and His people's enemies, including Satan, the world, and sin. He so completely controls and governs them by His hand that, apart from

His divine power and will, they cannot make even a single move.<sup>24</sup> This is His kingdom of power.

Second, they spoke of a *kingdom of grace*. That is His special rule over the lives of His dear children whom He serves out of His mediatorial office of mercy and compassion. Christ rules in the hearts of believers by the saving work of the Holy Spirit.

And they spoke of His *kingdom of glory* through which He prepares heavenly places for a people He will prepare on earth and whom He will bring to their everlasting God of glory.

Thus, how critical it is that you and I know Him not only in His kingdom of power, as we all shall know Him, for every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that He is Lord, but that we know Him internally in the kingdom of grace through faith in Him! Only then, when we are in His kingdom of grace, can we be assured that we will participate in His kingdom of glory. Otherwise, the very sound of Christ's voice—the voice of the Lord is full of majesty—will terrify us when He comes.

Do you see that everything hinges upon who Jesus is? Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "It is clear that if He is not who He claims to be, there is no need to listen to Him. If He is, then we are bound to listen to Him and to do whatever He may tell us to do. My own happiness is not the criterion. If He allows me to go on being ill or in trouble—whatever He says, I will answer, 'Yes, Lord.' I will do so because He is the Lord."<sup>25</sup> We may be sure that Christ is King because of God's Word. God made a solemn covenant with this

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4. Theodorus VanderGroe, *The Christian's Only Comfort in Life and Death: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. Bartel Elshout, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2016), 1:391.

5. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Authority* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1984), 21.

King (Ps. 110:1–4), and here we find some of God’s promises. This is very precious, for God’s promises to Christ are promises to all who belong to Christ’s kingdom.

*The Promises Made to God’s Appointed King*

Look now at verses 7–9: “I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” The Lord promised, first, *the glory belonging to God’s Son*. We must remember at this point what the rest of the Bible teaches us. Christ is eternal, without beginning or end (John 1:1; Heb. 1:10–12). He has always been the Son of the Father, even “before the world was” (John 17:5). Yet in the fullness of time, God’s Son became a man and was born of a woman (Gal. 4:4). Though equal to God the Father, God the Son took the nature of a servant and humbled Himself by becoming obedient even to death on the cross (Phil. 2:6–8). Therefore, God has exalted and honored His Son to the highest place as Lord of all (Phil. 2:9–11).

When Psalm 2:7 records God’s decree, “Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee,” it refers to Christ’s exaltation and enthronement as the risen Lord. The apostle Paul preaches this in Acts 13:33: “He hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.” Though Christ has been God’s Son from the beginning (Heb. 1:2), God promised that His humbled and lowly Son would be “declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4). Once put to shame on the cross, Christ was lifted up over the angels (Heb. 1:4–5).

We need never fear that the name of Jesus Christ will be disgraced. Though men and women may rage against Him, God will see to it that His beloved Son is honored. Christ's kingdom will be established in justice without end, for "the zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this" (Isa. 9:7). God's love for His Son guarantees that His kingdom cannot fail. John Owen said, "Though our persons fall, our cause shall be as truly, certainly, and infallibly victorious, as that Christ sits at the right hand of God.... The cause in which we are engaged shall surely conquer as Christ is alive and shall prevail at last.... The gospel shall be victorious."<sup>6</sup>

Second, God promised Christ *a worldwide inheritance of people*. The Father covenanted with His Son, "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance." This is a remarkable statement, for God's "inheritance" (*nakhalat*) was the nation of Israel.<sup>7</sup> Here, Christ's inheritance, the covenant people given to Him by God, includes the Gentile nations (Isa. 19:25). God promises not only that Christ will own this people, but that God will make them willing to be owned. Psalm 110:3 says to the One seated at God's right hand, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." The salvation of each soul is a work of Christ's power, a work of the conquering King of grace. It must be so, for the forces of sin and Satan fight to retain their dominion. John Flavel said, "Christ obtains a throne in the hearts of men...by conquest, for though the souls of the elect are his by donation and right of redemption (the

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6. John Owen, "The Use of Faith, If Popery Should Return Upon Us," in *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 9:507–508.

7. See Deut. 4:20; 9:26, 29; 32:9; 1 Kings 8:51; Pss. 28:9; 33:12; 78:62; 94:5; 106:5, 40.

Father gave them to him, and he died for them), yet Satan hath the first possession.”<sup>8</sup>

The Lord Jesus makes Himself that King of grace when He enters the heart of a sinner in the moment of regeneration. He is then that King of kings who comes with irresistible power to gain a heavenly conquest in the heart of a sinner. He rides His white horse, John tells us, and He shoots with His bow the sharp arrows of His Word into the hearts of sinners and causes them to be convicted and to cry out, “Take me out of the battle, for I am sore wounded!” He strips sinners of all their power and all their methods of salvation and draws them to find salvation in Christ alone. He sets up His throne of grace in the heart of a sinner. He causes grace to reign. He causes sin to no longer have dominion. “This is the regeneration,” say the Canons of Dort (3/4.12), “so highly celebrated in Scripture and denominated a new creation: a resurrection from the dead, a making alive, which God works in us without our aid.”<sup>9</sup>

Christ not only begins with His Word and Spirit as King of kings, but He also governs His people by that same Word and Spirit. He leads them in the way of salvation. He keeps them. He reigns. He watches over them in every respect. He is King over all the spiritual battles of their souls. He understands their thoughts afar off. Oh, what a precious governor Christ is! Not that He governs the way *we* want Him to; His thoughts are above our thoughts and His ways are above our ways. But as King of kings He governs His people in the way that is best for them.

The living church is in the hands of Christ, and that is their great comfort. Is it your comfort? Are you in the

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8. John Flavel, *Fountain of Life*, in *The Works of John Flavel* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1968), 1:201.

9. *The Three Forms of Unity* (Vestavia Hills, Ala.: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2010), 144.

hands of Christ? Do you know what it means to bow under His kingship? Is He your King by grace? Have you learned to know Him as that wise King who makes no mistakes, who directs your whole life in such a way that you have to say later on, "Lord, Thou hath done all things well"? Is He a wooing King for you who woos you and wins you to His love so that you learn to trust Him and to say with your whole heart, "Thy will be done"? We don't learn that in a day, and we need to relearn it again and again. But the more we are acquainted with the kingship of Christ, the more we learn to trust Him and His will rather than ourselves and our will.

Third, God promised to Christ a *crushing victory over His enemies*. The Father said, "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." The picture is vivid, bloody, and frightening: the warrior goes forth with an iron club and crushes his enemies like fragile pottery. Already Christ rules the world with "a rod of iron," using His supreme power to fight against the wicked forces of evil (Rev. 12:5). Though He is the Lamb that was slain for our sins to redeem sinners for God, He also is the Lord who holds the scroll of God in His hand and unleashes God's judgments upon the nations so that the gospel may go forth on the white horse of victory (Rev. 5, 6).

Christ is the defender of His people. He will keep an eye upon His people and He will defend them from every enemy. What a blessing! He will keep them from sin's dominion and will protect them from its damning power. He will deliver them from Satan and all his devices, assaults, and temptations. He delivers from the world with all its enticements, with all its drawing power. He will keep His people *in* the world but be sure that they do not become *of* the world. He will protect from heretical doctrine. He will keep the feet of His saints in the pathway

of His truth. He will protect us from ourselves, which is the greatest wonder of all, that we may not re-enslave ourselves to sin or self-righteousness. He will protect from unbelief. He will protect even in death. He will protect not from physical dying but from the sting of death, from the punishment of death, from the spiritual and eternal forms of death. He will protect as the great King, as a King who is mightier than Satan, world, self, and death combined. He is almighty. Asa cried unto God, "LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power" (2 Chron. 14:11).

This promise of "a rod of iron" will find its ultimate fulfilment when Christ returns on the day of judgment. Revelation 19 presents the vision of the Rider on a white horse who comes to wage war, and says in verses 15–16, "And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

The day of judgment will be ushered in with a glorious coming of the Son of God on the clouds of heaven. He shall come "in the glory of his Father" (Matt. 16:27). In that day, the glory of His Father will radiate from Jesus Christ as He comes in solemn majesty with divine authority. The glory of the Father with which Christ will appear is Christ's own glory (Matt. 25:31), for God's Son is "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person" (Heb. 1:3). Thomas Manton told us that "this glory must be exceeding great," for it is the glory of the "God-man" infinitely more majestic than all created persons in heaven and earth; it is the glory of "the judge of the world, who now cometh to appear upon the throne to be seen by all"; and it is the glory of a great work "on the one side, to gather together,

to convince, to judge, and punish creatures opposite and rebellious; and to honour and reward his servants, on the other.”<sup>10</sup> So much glory of God shall shine forth at His coming and shall fill the heavens and the earth that the ungodly shall cry out, “Mountains and rocks, fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb” (Rev. 6:16).

Jesus’s coming shall be sudden. We don’t know when. We know that we are living in the last times. We know that it may be soon. We know it will be unexpected, coming as a thief in the night (1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10). He will come when few are expecting Him.

When He comes, it will be the day of resurrection and judgment. All mankind shall hear His voice and come out of their graves to receive either life or damnation (John 5:28–29). And in that day, there will be no more mockers who shall challenge the promises of God. But in that day all the ungodly shall have their knees knock together in fear. In that day all that is truly real shall become real. Christ shall become real, eternity shall become real, the fact that I have a soul shall become real. Yet it will be too late to repent.

When we are brought to give an account before God in that day, nothing shall escape the Lord. Every thought, every word, every action shall be accounted for. The Lord is not in a hurry on the day of judgment. The day of judgment is a day in which everyone shall give an account. And if we are not ready to meet God in that day, if we are not washed by the blood of Jesus in that day, our entire lives shall have been a miserable failure. You can be successful in your job in the eyes of men; you can have a happy family; you can have a relatively easy life; you can

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10. Thomas Manton, Sermon 19 upon Matthew 25, in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1872), 10:23–24.

have a cheerful and positive character; but if in that day you are not under the cleansing power of the blood of the Son of God, your entire life will have been a miserable, eternal failure.

Are you ready for the day of the Lord? If Jesus were to come today, would you be ready to meet Him? Do you have a new heart? Are you born again? Have you learned to hate sin? Have you learned to love the Lord? Is your faith in Christ alone? Are you ready for the great day which is the only thing that we know for sure is coming in our lives? Your plans for tomorrow you don't know if you will be able to realize, but this you know, Jesus is coming. This we know, you and I—if we are four years old, if we are eighty-four years old—Jesus is coming. We must be *ready*. We *must* be ready. We must be ready.

### **The Sinner's Refuge**

Next, in verses 10–12, we see the sinner's refuge or hiding place: “Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.”

The Lord can terrify the rebels with His word of judgment, but now He speaks to them with His word of grace. They must stop being so foolish as to “imagine a vain thing” (v. 1), and instead “be wise” and receive God's correction. The day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God has not yet arrived. There is still time for mercy; we live in the day of grace.

God calls rebellious men, women, and children, and even kings and high officials of the government, to repent of their rebellion against Him. Repentance is not just an improvement in behavior, but a completely new direction for the heart. The Scripture says, “Serve the LORD with

fear, and rejoice with trembling.” You have despised God; you have treated Him like a little ant upon which you may put your foot. You must now see Him and reverence Him as the omnipotent Lord who holds you in His hand. You have hated God; you have turned away from Him like a disgusting, hateful enemy. You must now know Him and love Him as the supreme Good who is the giver of all good gifts. This combination of fear and joy arises from a true faith. Wilhelmus à Brakel said, “Such a soul exalts Him above all, has a high esteem for His majesty, which is delightful and awe-inspiring, and stirs up in him extraordinary reverence.”<sup>11</sup>

To honor God, we must honor God’s King. To honor the Father, we must honor the Son (John 5:23). “Kiss the Son,” the Bible says. In the ancient Near East and in some cultures today, a kiss was a common way to say hello. However, a kiss could also be a sign of submission to authority or even an act of worship.<sup>12</sup> In today’s language, we would say, “Bow down to the Son.” Bow not just your body, but bow your heart because Jesus is Lord. If you continue in your rebellion, Christ’s anger will come upon you like a burning fire. If you will trust in Him, then His love will bless you forever.

What a blessed King! He is the great Physician. Sometimes a doctor says, “I will take no new patients. I am booked full.” But this Doctor is never booked full until He comes again on the clouds. Then it will be too late to seek Him. Still today He receives new patients who have nothing to offer Him but putrefying sores and deadly bruises from head to toe. Still today, He receives children, young people, parents, grandparents. Some physicians

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11. Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, trans. Bartel Elshout, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1992), 1:570.

12. See 1 Sam. 10:1; 1 Kings 19:18; Job 31:26–27; Hos. 13:2.

specialize. Some only see children; some only do one or two particular tasks. But this physician does every task, and this physician sees all kinds of patients—all kinds of races, all kinds of classes, all kinds of people. There is no one who has sinned too much; there is no heart too hard; there are no hopeless cases with Him. He never has to send anyone home, saying, “There is nothing I can do for you.” And beside all this, He does all His work freely. He has paid the price Himself. He has earned as High Priest to do what He does as King.

Do you see no beauty in Him to desire Him? Can you be your own king? Can you rescue yourself from Satan and sin and evil? Are you so strong, my friend, that you can stand up to the powers of evil without the power of Jesus? Do you not yet know your own heart at all? I urge you to bow before this King, take refuge in Him, and be made a subject of Him. The subjects of this King are the only truly joyful people on the face of this earth. I know there are a lot of people who do a lot more laughing and they have more worldly fun, but I am speaking of true joy, deep joy in the heart, the joy of knowing God, the joy of being safe in the hands of Christ, the joy of being a willing subject of a worthy King of kings! That is a joy that the world does not know, and that joy is yet available. Bow, sinner; bow before it is forever too late!

How do you bow your heart? You bow by believing in Him. There is a wonderful specificity to the last sentence of Psalm 2: “Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.” We are saved by faith in Christ alone. Saving faith, or saving believing, believes something. Saving faith is not the kind of faith that so many people make it out to be today when they say, “It really doesn’t make too much difference what you believe. As long as you are sincere, as long as you believe, it’s okay, and you will be going to heaven, no matter what you believe, just as long as you

are sure that you really believe what you believe.” That doctrine is from the bottom of hell. We do not believe that we can be saved by a faith without content. Faith believes something. Faith depends on someone outside of yourself to be and to do what you cannot be or do.

Faith is expressed by the idea of leaning your weight upon something. Proverbs 3:5 says, “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.” Missionary John Paton related how he discovered how to translate faith in the native language of the Pacific islanders of the New Hebrides. One day, he was sitting in a chair and he had an idea. He asked a native woman, “What am I doing?” She said, “You are sitting down.” He then pulled up his feet off the floor so that his weight rested entirely on the chair and repeated the question. She answered, “You are leaning wholly,” using a term in their language for depending entirely upon one thing for support. Paton knew that this was the term he must use for faith. He would now tell the islanders they must be “leaning on Jesus” for eternal life.<sup>13</sup> Are you leaning on Jesus? Have you rested the weight of your sins and your guilt before God, your future hope and happiness, entirely upon Christ? You must do so in order to be saved.

Another way to express faith is the idea of taking refuge or hiding in something. That is the term used in Psalm 2:12: “put their trust in him” is literally “take refuge” (*hasah*) or “hide themselves in him.” King Jesus can be your hiding place. David prays in Psalm 18:2, “The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.” When sin and Satan, death and hell, and the wicked people of this

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13. A. K. Langridge and Frank H. L. Paton, *John G. Paton: Later Years and Farewell* (New York and London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), 56.

world surround you, hide in Jesus Christ. If you take refuge in God's King, then you will find yourself "blessed" by God (Ps. 2:12b).

Blessed means granted by God everything necessary for life and happiness. Thus, God teaches here where true enjoyment is to be found, namely, in willing subjection to the King of kings. Hiding in the shadow of His wings, Christ's people drink from the river of His delights (Ps. 36:7-8). They are enabled to praise God even in their sleepless nights, in the days of warfare and strife, for the Lord's hand upholds them (Ps. 63:3-9).

However, the blessedness spoken of here goes far beyond our present communion with Christ. God's people will see the King in His beauty. This King prepares a place for them in glory and He makes them homesick for that glory. He preserves them for the full enjoyment of that salvation He has purchased for us. They shall enter a land of enjoyment of which Scripture says, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). In that day, there shall be no more sin. There shall be no more Satan, no more world, no more influences from my own evil heart, and no more death. Oh, to be preserved forever, preserved to enjoy God the Father through God the Son by God the Spirit; to enjoy the company of the redeemed, the saints made perfect, and the legions of holy angels! The Lord will be the glory of heaven (Zech. 2:5).

Thus, the Christian life is a life that knows true enjoyment, a joy that would not be traded for all the pleasures of this world (Ps. 4:7). That is why we read in Nehemiah 8:10, "The joy of the LORD is your strength." Is that your strength, my friend, the joy of the Lord? Is that your strength? Do you know both the sorrow of sin and the joy of divine fellowship?

The Westminster Shorter Catechism opens so beautifully: “What is the chief end of man?” What is the chief purpose of your life? “To glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”<sup>14</sup> Forever. This is a kingdom that does not end with death or the grave. This King went through death and through the grave to conquer them both so that death may have no sting, so that the grave may be a pillow for His people, and so that they may arise one day with soul and body reunited, and with the whole man may glorify God and enjoy Him forever. This is the end result of the kingship of Jesus.

Oh, happy is that people who has the God of Jacob, King Jesus, for their help, whose hope is in the Lord their God. One day, dear child of God, you shall be fully delivered from all evil. You shall fully enjoy the gracious, glorious presence of your faithful King. And then your greatest happiness shall be to praise Him; your greatest freedom shall be to serve Him; your greatest honor shall be to obey Him; and your greatest peace shall be to dwell with Him. Everything then shall be focused for you upon this King of kings. All our hearts will go back out to the King of kings, and we will say, “Not unto us, O King of kings, be honor, and glory, and dominion, but unto Thee, O King immortal, to Thee be all honor, glory, and dominion.” Truly, “blessed are all they that put their trust in him” (Ps. 2:12b). Amen.

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14. James T. Dennison Jr., comp., *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: 1523–1693* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008–2014), 4:353.

# Salvation for Sinners

*Rev. Bartel Elshout*

Psalter 319:1, 2, 5

Scripture: Acts 4:1–22

Psalter 87:1–3

Psalter 187:1–4

Psalter 3:3, 4

*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*

—Acts 4:12

If you were to study a regional map, you would readily see that there are many ways that lead to a given city. It's a familiar saying that all ways lead to Rome; one could approach the city in a variety of ways.

Today there are those who would have us believe that there are many ways that lead to God. Even though some would perhaps admit that the way set forth by Christianity is the best way, there are others who would have us believe that anyone can come to God in a way that seems suitable to him. We know, however, that God's Word tells us otherwise. God's Word, from Genesis to Revelation, plainly and clearly tells us that there is only one way to God, to be reconciled to Him. There is only one way in which God can be gracious to us and receive us as sinners. Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, is that one and only Way. Christ affirmed this by declaring, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

From the dawn of history, God has communicated to sinners the necessity of the substitutionary sacrifice of the Lamb of God. He revealed this fundamental truth to our first parents, who in turn communicated it to their sons. Abel became the first preacher of the gospel (Luke 11:50–51) by declaring that salvation is attainable only on the basis of the bloody sacrifice—thus only by believing in the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

This only, biblical, unique gospel is powerfully articulated for us in our text, Acts 4:12. Peter uttered these words as he stood before the Sanhedrin: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” This passage speaks of salvation for sinners:

1. In Christ alone: “Neither is there salvation in any other.”
2. Revealed in Christ’s name: “for there is none other name under heaven given among men.”
3. As a divine must: “whereby we must be saved.”

### **Salvation is in Christ Alone**

As we consider the historical context of this text, we realize that Peter’s testimony was given not long after an extraordinary day in redemption history had occurred, when it pleased the Lord Jesus Christ, as the ascended King of the church, to send the Holy Spirit upon all flesh. Upon that remarkable day, the Spirit of God was poured out in such a mighty way that the same disciples who had all been offended at the suffering of Christ were now filled with the Holy Spirit. This experience emboldened them to declare the works of God in all the languages known to man at that time. Peter, the man who had denied his Master, stood up and preached a most remarkable sermon. In this sermon, he clearly proved that what was transpiring

had been prophesied by the prophet Joel. He also spoke of the suffering, dying, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. This sermon had Christ as its focus from beginning to end. However, it was also a sermon in which he, moved by the Spirit, boldly proclaimed to these people that they had been responsible for the death of their own Messiah, the Son of God.

Indeed, what an extraordinary day it was! God was pleased to use that sermon to save many souls. Moved by the Spirit of Christ, Peter preached a Christ-centered and Christ-exalting sermon. He preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified in an extraordinary and compelling fashion, and the pentecostal Spirit caused the faithful preaching of Christ to bear fruit by pricking three thousand sinners in their hearts. Three thousand men and women cried out in holy desperation, “What must we do to be saved?” Many sinners, by grace, embraced the Christ whom Peter had preached. We are told near the end of the chapter that many were added to those who must and should be saved (Acts 2:47).

Then, in the third chapter, we read of the remarkable incident that occurred when John and Peter went to the temple at the ninth hour—the time of the evening sacrifice and worship. There they encountered a forty-year-old man who for years had been sitting there begging by stretching forth his poor beggar’s hands and looking for alms. It is noteworthy that this man was a contemporary of Jesus during His sojourn on earth. He dwelt in Jerusalem when Jesus was healing many sick ones and even raising people from the dead. Yet this man had not been healed during that time.

John and Peter saw this man as he stretched forth his hand and looked for alms. Boys and girls, you know how the story proceeds. Peter looked at this man and said, “What you’re looking for I don’t have. I don’t have gold or

silver, but what I do have, that I will give you. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, stand up and walk.” The lame beggar received faith to believe those words, and this lame man, known by so many, now walked.

What a tremendous impression that made! As a result, a large crowd gathered. Peter, moved by the Holy Spirit, preached the gospel again. He preached plainly to these Jewish people, and he ended his convicting sermon with the wonderful words: “Unto you first, God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (Acts 3:26).

Peter, in compelling language, offered salvation to these children of Abraham, and God was pleased to bless that preaching again in a mighty way. The result was the opposite of what the Sanhedrin had hoped for. Their hope was that the voice of Jesus of Nazareth would be silenced forever because of the crucifixion. Instead, all of Jerusalem was filled with His name. How grieved the Pharisees and the Sadducees were that the apostles taught the people that Jesus had risen from the dead! They sought to counteract this teaching by laying their hands on them and putting them in prison. On the next day, the apostles were summoned to appear before the Sanhedrin to give an account of what had happened. They were cross-examined by the Sanhedrin and were asked, “By what power or by what name have ye done this?”

This was a very intimidating moment. Appearing before the Sanhedrin would give any Jew weak knees. Yet Peter is not at all intimidated. Why? Was it because Peter was such a courageous man? Was it because he was naturally so bold? We know better! It was not that long ago that Peter proved to be a coward when he was fearful of a maid and denied his Master three times. Yet this same Peter was now the spokesman. Why was there such a difference? The Word of God tells us that he was filled with the Holy

Spirit, and that makes all the difference! The Holy Spirit transformed this man into a bold witness for the name and sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit always makes the difference in the history of God's church.

Congregation, we so much need the ministry of the Spirit today! Only the Spirit can render the ministry of the gospel fruitful in the hearts of sinners. Even today, God's servants need the Holy Spirit to proclaim the name of the Lord Jesus Christ with the same boldness with which Peter proclaimed it. Thus the greatest need of this hour is that we would cry to God to grant a fresh outpouring of His Spirit. He alone is able to make life to abound; He alone can cause the church of the Lord Jesus Christ to flourish; He alone can render the preaching of the gospel fruitful; and He alone can transform weak and feeble men into bold witnesses of His truth.

Peter looked these men directly in the eye and said, "If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole, be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole." Once more, we observe that Peter does not hesitate to call sin by its name. In Acts 2, he told the Jewish people, "You have crucified the Messiah." In chapter 3, he did likewise, and here he also does not hesitate to confront the Sanhedrin with what they have done. However, Peter does more than that! Moved by the Holy Spirit, Peter uses this most unusual and unique situation as an opportunity of proclaiming the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, even to these men.

With holy boldness, he says, "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner." Then follow the marvelous words of our text, "Neither is there salvation in any other." Though these

words are simple and well known, they are powerful and rich in meaning. Peter proclaimed this truth boldly to men who trusted in Moses and in their own righteousness, and also to Sadducees who denied the resurrection of the dead. Peter proclaims the gospel even to these men and says plainly, "You need to know that the one you have rejected and crucified has been raised by God, and salvation cannot be secured in any other way except by believing in that Christ and in His name, for salvation is in none other. There are no alternatives. There are no other options. Salvation can be obtained only through this Christ."

Congregation, let us proceed by focusing briefly on the word "salvation." We are so accustomed to using this word. But do we fully grasp its meaning and its significance? This is a weighty question, for the word "salvation" constitutes the heart of our text. If I were to interview you, or if I were to ask you to write the meaning of the word "salvation," would you be able to explain it to me? Boys and girls, if I were to ask you what you think salvation is, what answer would you give me? We know that the rich meaning of that word has been greatly reduced today in evangelical America. For many confessing Christians, salvation simply means deliverance from hell and the securing of a place in heaven. It seems that many view being saved from hell and going to heaven as the essence of what salvation is. Salvation is for them the way to avoid everlasting punishment. Is this not part of salvation? Yes, it undoubtedly is! Those who are saved by Christ are saved from the wrath to come, and they will one day enjoy the favor of God forever in His presence. However, these are only some of the benefits of salvation.

The Greek word used here literally means "to make whole." The root idea expressed here is *restoration*. That is significant because *restoration* constitutes the essence of salvation. When God saves sinners, He makes them

whole again; that is, He restores them. He restores sinners to what He originally created men to be. It thus follows that salvation ultimately results in the restoration of the father/child relationship that existed in Paradise. Such was indeed the intimate and covenantal relationship between God and man, for Adam was His son (Luke 3:38), and God was his Father.

This restoration defines the ultimate purpose of salvation, as well as the reason why God gave His only begotten Son in the fullness of time. The great objective of Christ's incarnation was that sinners would be brought back into a father/child relationship with God. To be whole again means that I am reunited with God, that I belong to the family of God, that God is my Father, and that I am His child. One of the wonderful benefits of that restored relationship is that I am indeed delivered from the wrath to come and can look forward to a future of being forever in the presence of God. Again, that is the benefit. However, the real essence of salvation is reconciliation with God and the full restoration of a covenant relationship with Him. To be saved means that the God whom we have provoked by our sins will, for Christ's sake, be favorably disposed toward us.

Consequently, sin in all of its ugly aspects had to be dealt with in order to achieve salvation. To save sinners, the curse of sin had to be dealt with—the curse of God that rests upon every human being by nature. A way had to be found to deliver man from the guilt of sin, for sin renders us worthy of everlasting punishment. A way had to be found to deliver man from the dreadful moral pollution of sin. To be saved means that we must be delivered from all of that because a holy God cannot possibly have a relationship with a human being as long as his sins have not been removed. God therefore gave His only begotten Son, for He knew that from our side it would be an eternal

impossibility to eliminate all that separates us from Him. God knew that the only solution would be to give His only begotten Son in the fullness of time, thus making Him who knew no sin to be sin; making Him the embodiment of God's curse, so that through Him, God would be able to bless us again (2 Cor. 5:21, Gal. 3:13–14).

This is comprehended in the remarkable word “salvation,” and Peter therefore boldly proclaims, “All of this can only be obtained in and through this Christ.” In all simplicity, Peter is here telling us that, apart from Christ, it is utterly impossible to be restored into a right relationship with God. It is impossible to be whole apart from Christ. God cannot be gracious to us, and He can only manifest His wrath to the children of men. However, through Christ, the only begotten Son whom the Father has given to be a sacrifice for sin, God has accomplished a full and complete salvation. That is the marvelous message of our text! Though it declares unequivocally that there are no other options, it also powerfully implies that in Christ there is a full and free salvation for the vilest of sinners. In Christ, the chief of sinners can be made whole again. Through Christ and His accomplished work on the cross, our sins can be blotted out, our guilt can be removed, and the curse of God's law can be silenced. In Christ, the way to God has been opened again, and God stretches forth His arms of mercy. In Christ, He invites us to come to Him as we are, and He freely offers us peace and pardon. In this Christ, there is salvation full and free—salvation in Christ alone!

### **Salvation is Revealed in Christ's Name**

It is, however, also noteworthy that our text states that “there is none other name under heaven given among men.” Not only has God provided this wondrous salvation, but He has also revealed it; He has made it known. That

is why specific reference is made here to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. You are undoubtedly familiar with the fact that names are important in the Bible. Names were not merely given to establish the unique identity of individuals. On the contrary, when giving a name to their children, Jewish parents were expressing their hope that their child would live up to the meaning of the selected name and would serve the Lord.

We also know, however, that God gives Himself names. We recognize, of course, that God does not need a name to distinguish Himself from other gods because there are no other gods. We do know, however, why God has revealed Himself by way of names, and why He has given Himself various names in His Word. By means of His names, God lets us know who He is, revealing His character to us, and permitting us, so to speak, to look into His heart. This is particularly true of the Old Testament name *Jehovah*, a name which in the Old Testament was God's name above every other name. It revealed His covenant faithfulness; it revealed that He is the I AM THAT I AM. That fact explains why He has eternally been moved within Himself to find a way of salvation. All of God's names, especially this magnificent name, find their culmination in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul therefore writes that God gave Him a name above every name, for there is indeed no other name in which we hear the heart of God beat as clearly and as loudly as in that of Jesus Christ.

God is pleased to reveal Himself to us through His names. We could therefore say that, in a very real sense, the entire Word of God is the unveiling and revelation of His name. Why is this such a delightful truth? It is delightful because it gives us some insight into the character of God, a God who truly delights to reveal Himself and to make Himself known. God delights to open His heart to the children of men.

We see that revelation immediately after man fell. Following his creation, Adam had enjoyed daily fellowship with God and found the fulfillment of his life in his intimate relationship with Him. Tragically, however, Adam turned his back upon his Maker and divorced himself from God. Though Adam no longer desired fellowship with God, God immediately showed us in the beginning of His Word that it was His desire to reveal Himself even to His fallen creatures—even to a man who was hiding from His presence. Rather than waiting for Adam to seek Him, God sought him out. He called him out of hiding and back into His presence. Why? To destroy him? No, but to proclaim the gospel to him and to open His heart to him. God declared to Adam that though he had forged a friendship with Satan, He would send the seed of the woman, His only begotten Son, in the fullness of time. Through His Son, men could be brought back into a friendship and covenantal relationship with Him.

As history then begins to unfold, especially as recorded in Scripture, we observe the confirmation of the fact that God desires His name to be known. God wants the children of men to know who He is, even though we, by nature, have no desire to know Him. Left to our own devices, there would not be a single human being who would seek after God. Not a single son or daughter of Adam would ever have desired salvation! Yet, because God is who He is, that is, the I AM THAT I AM, He pursues fallen man. He seeks them out, and He gives them His revelation of Himself. That moves Him to give us His Word—and thus the gospel itself. He sees to it that the proclamation of His name will reach the children of men, even to the ends of the earth.

God is doing that even today! He is giving to us, the children of men, the record He has given us of His Son (1 John 5:10), by giving us His Word. He does it because

He wants us to know of the name of His well-beloved Son. His Spirit has therefore inspired the secondary authors of Scripture to write that Word, so that we might know of that only name given under heaven, the name of His only begotten Son. That is God's desire and good pleasure.

Oh, how privileged we are! The Word that is proclaimed to us, and that we may have in our homes, is God's sovereign gift to us. Our text states that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is the only name "under heaven given among men." It not only is a sovereign gift, but it also is an entirely undeserved gift to us and our children. Thus the gospel preached to us from Lord's Day to Lord's Day is God's sovereign gift to us. God has seen to it that we have known of the name of His only begotten Son from the days of our infancy. He gave His well-beloved Son in the fullness of time to be the Savior of men, to live among men, to walk among men, to minister to men, and ultimately to suffer and die for men—for sons and daughters of Adam, for enemies of God, for rebels. God has given a name, the name of His only begotten Son, to such wretched sinners as we are.

Dear congregation, let me ask you this soul-searching question: What does that precious name mean to you? Has the name of the Lord Jesus Christ become the name above all names for you? Has this Jesus become the only solution for your guilty and polluted soul? Have you learned that lesson experientially in your soul by the ministry of the Holy Spirit? Are you convinced in the inner recesses of your soul that there is salvation in none other except in this Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ?

This is preeminently how the Holy Spirit works savingly in the hearts of sinners, making room in their lives for that only name. He accomplishes His work by emptying and stripping us of all of our own righteousness, so that we stand before God in our utter spiritual nakedness. In

so doing, He aims to bring us to the point of holy despair. How precious it then becomes when the same Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of Christ, sheds light upon this altogether lovely and precious name of the Lord Jesus Christ! What unspeakable joy then fills the soul of a sinner when he may discover, as if he had never heard it before, that indeed the God-given solution for his guilty and polluted soul lies in this name! In it God unveils to us His full and free salvation whereby we may be fully reconciled with Him. Has it become a wonder to you that God has given that name to the children of men, and that He has thus given us the revelation of Himself?

Although this point is not the main one of our text, we should also note that, as a congregation, we have a great responsibility, for one of the reasons why God gives us the revelation of His name and gives us His Word is that we would pass that Word on to others—we who have been privileged to receive that precious gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. That privilege obligates us, by virtue of what God has graciously and sovereignly given us in the gospel, to proclaim that one and only name to others, even to the ends of the world.

### **This Salvation is a Divine Must**

There is, however, another wonderful thought embedded in the words of our text. Not only does the text state plainly that salvation is in Christ alone, and that this salvation is marvelously revealed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, but it also posits that this salvation is a divine must. I deliberately added the adjective “divine” because the Greek word translated as “must” is a remarkable little word that is nearly always linked to God’s eternal purpose and sovereign good pleasure; therefore, when the Scriptures tell us that the Son of Man must be lifted up, it means that His crucifixion was an eternal and divine must.

That good pleasure is the ultimate reason why the gospel has been proclaimed throughout the history of the world. God continues to send forth into this world men called by Him to proclaim the name of His only begotten Son, declaring that salvation is in none other than Christ. It all proceeds from that eternal must, for God has eternally been moved within Himself to save vile and wretched sinners. That is the only reason there is salvation for fallen sinners worthy of damnation. That “must” explains why we have a gospel to proclaim, even in our day. More importantly, it explains why there are sinners who, by grace, believe this gospel. Furthermore, it explains why there are people in this congregation who, by the grace of God, love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. The reason is to be found in that eternal must, in that sovereign and eternal good pleasure.

God has eternally been moved within Himself to save a people for His Son and by His Son. Eternally, He chose an innumerable multitude of men and women in His Son, and He gave them to His Son in order to be redeemed by His Son, to be united to Him, and to be conformed to His image. All of that is comprehended in that eternal must, in God’s eternal good pleasure. The proclamation of the gospel has therefore been a must throughout history. God Himself stirs up His people and His servants to proclaim this magnificent gospel. Ultimately, the infinite and eternal love of God is the moving cause of all gospel ministry. Better yet, God Himself is the driving force of church history. He is the one who sees to it that this gospel reaches the utmost corners of the earth. He is the one who brings sinners in contact with that precious Word that speaks of the only name given under heaven.

Dear believer, what reason you have to pause and consider! You came in contact with that Word because your salvation was an eternal must, and it was therefore an

eternal must that that Word should also come to you. It was an eternal must that you should become acquainted with the name of God's only begotten Son in order that, by believing on Him, you might be saved. It was that eternal must that brought the Lord Jesus to the well of Samaria, for we read in John 4:4, "He must needs go through Samaria." The word "must" used here is identical to the "must" of our text. Jesus, in accord with His Father's good pleasure, had to go through Samaria, because a woman there, and many others who belonged to her community, had to become acquainted with Him.

Thanks be to God for that eternal must, for were it not for that eternal must, there would not be one human being who would ever seek after God. What a confirmation that is for the fact that we should never view God's sovereignty negatively nor maintain a negative assessment of election. It is so true what Spurgeon says: election is the friend of sinners. The decree of election unveils to us that God has eternally purposed to take the initiative toward sinners, knowing that you and I would never take the initiative toward Him. Again, thanks be to God for that eternal must whereby we must be saved!

Congregation, it is also obvious from the context of our text, that we need to examine it from the vantage point of how we are to respond to the proclamation of the only name given under heaven. The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ includes the compelling message that you *must* be saved. You must be saved today because there may never be a tomorrow for you. You must be saved, for if you are not saved, you will have to endure the everlasting wrath of God, for it will be a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

My dear friend, if you are still unconverted, you are so because you are still an unbeliever. The Bible clearly designates unconverted men and women as unbelievers.

The word “unconverted” seems somewhat more palatable to us, for we somehow want to believe that the cause for our unconverted state is not ultimately to be found within us, but instead, in the fact that God has not yet graciously dealt with us. You need to recognize, however, that being “unconverted” means that you have not yet turned or repented, and the reason you have not repented is because you have an unbelieving heart. It is a manifestation of your unbelief. You don’t believe the record God has given of His Son; therefore, you do not truly believe what the Scriptures say. For if you did, you would turn or repent today, and you would turn to the Christ of the Scriptures, crying out to Him, “Oh, son of David, have mercy upon me!”

Are you still not reconciled with God? I must tell you on behalf of the Savior who bears this wonderful name that you must be saved; you must turn to Him today without delay; come to Him without money and without price. You are only one heartbeat, one tragic accident away from being summoned before the Judge of all the earth. So it was for all who died suddenly and unexpectedly this past week. They instantly appeared before God. So it could also be with you! As long as you are not reconciled with God, as long as you have not embraced Christ by faith, and as long as you have not believed on His name, the only name whereby you must be saved, you are in great peril. You are living on the threshold of eternity. We are all walking, so to speak, on the edge of the grave, and we can fall into that grave at any given moment.

Are you prepared for that moment? Are you saved? Are you reconciled with God? Have your sins been blotted out? Do you know, based on biblical grounds, that you may belong to the people of God, to those who have trusted in the only name given under heaven? Do you belong to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, that is, the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ? Dear friends, your

salvation is a must! Boys and girls, it is also a must for you. I do not want you to look at older people and say to yourself, "For those people who are seventy or eighty years old, to be saved is a real must." No, you need to realize that to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is also a must for you. It is a must for you today. Today is the accepted time. Today is the day of salvation. Today you must be saved!

You need to recognize and acknowledge that the gift of this only and precious name of Jesus is a matter of great urgency. God sends His Word to us because He knows that without believing on this Savior, you are lost and you will perish. He is a God who has no pleasure in your death, but rather, that you would turn unto Him and live. He has affirmed this truth when swearing by His very own name, thereby declaring that He would cease to be God if it were not true that He has no pleasure in your death. This is the God who says to you today, "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will you die, O house of Israel?" This God is the God who delights in mercy, who says to you today, "Sinner, you must be saved. There is no other name given under heaven whereby you must be saved. Salvation is in none other but in My Son."

My dear friends, you *must* be saved! How could you appear before God, having had the privilege of hearing the name of His only begotten Son proclaimed to you, having belonged to those to whom that name has been given sovereignly and undeservedly? If you should appear before God without having believed but having rejected that name, your situation will be dreadful indeed. You have ignored the rich gospel—that loving, urgent gospel invitation, that free offer of salvation of which Peter said, "unto you first, God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:26). You must then appear before Him. To have heard such a gospel will then be a dreadful

thing indeed! Consider the solemn words of Jesus who said that it would be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for those to whom this precious gospel has been proclaimed, for those to whom this precious Christ has been offered.

Turn with me to John 12, where the Lord Jesus Christ Himself articulates these truths clearly, beginning with verse 44: “Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.” Here you have the promise of the gospel in all its simplicity. But now consider what follows: “And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.”

Here we have the essence of the matter. This gospel is about a person, namely, the person of the Lord Jesus Christ whose name is the only name under heaven whereby we must be saved. In this gospel, God freely offers His beloved Son, for salvation is entirely bound up in His Son. Therefore, woe to those who reject Him! “He that rejecteth me hath one that judges him: the word that I have spoken, it will judge him in that day.”

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, therefore, I urge you with all the love of my heart: Do not delay any longer! No longer trifle with your gospel privileges. “Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver” (Ps. 50:22). “Lest....” What a remarkable little word! What a powerful affirmation it is that God truly has no pleasure in your death! Therefore, even today, God is sincerely and

unconditionally proffering peace and pardon, doing so as if you were the only person in church.

God would have you know even today that there is salvation in His Son, a full and complete salvation. His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is a Savior who saves to the uttermost—a Savior who is willing to save the vilest and most wretched of all sinners. We may declare to you that you are welcome to Him, that He will receive you, and that He will in no wise cast you out.

Dear believer, what reason you have to be humbled greatly! Indeed, what an unspeakable wonder it is that this precious name was not only given to you, but by the grace of God, you have also embraced that Savior, and you have taken refuge in Him! All glory be therefore to God alone. Yet be mindful of your responsibility, for that name was given to you so that you might proclaim it to others, proclaiming to other men and women who are perishing and dying, that they too must be saved.

Hear therefore the Word of God as it comes to us today—this remarkable word uttered by Peter who was filled with the Holy Ghost, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Amen.

# Our Faith Tested

*Rev. Foppe VanderZwaag*

Psalter 349

Scripture: James 2

Psalter 365

Psalter 150

Psalter 24

*Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?*

—James 2:21

Anyone familiar with the letter of James knows that this text is maybe one of the most disputed parts of the Bible. In chapter 1, he tells us to be doers of the Word. In chapter 2, he applies that to the sin of prejudice. Now he takes this to an extreme, almost causing Luther to reject it as God's Word. However, it is not as complicated as it appears. What we have here is our faith tested:

1. By what we *Know*
2. By what we *Feel*
3. By what we *Do*

## **By what we *Know***

Let's first consider the *question*. Verse 14: "Can faith save?" This is a rhetorical question: its answer is plain: an emphatic *no!* What? Can faith not save us? Isn't that a key doctrine of the Christian life? What about Ephesians 2:8–9, "For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God. Not

of works, lest any man should boast”? Does James contradict Paul? No, not at all. James wants to make sure that we understand what faith is all about. You see, everyone has faith, believes in someone or something. The question is not whether or not we have faith, but is my faith true faith? And how do we know? It’s a matter of life and death.

Second, the *illustration*. In verses 15 and 16, we read about a brother or sister in desperate need for clothes or food coming to your door to ask for help. Imagine it’s a cold winter evening and you tell them to go in peace, be warm, and filled—without asking them in or at least, giving them clothes and food. What profit or good will that do them? Will your words make them warm and full? Of course not! You can say you have faith, but your actions reveal you don’t have true, that is saving, biblical faith. So James really asks, “Can that faith save?” No, it’s dead.

Third, the *point*. In verse 17, James says that such faith is dead, being alone. In 1:21, he wrote, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction.” Now that’s true faith in action. It’s easy to say some words and make a profession of faith, but it’s a lot harder to put them into action. We find this confirmed in Christ’s words, “Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:40). We can know all the doctrines of God’s Word, but without works we are still dead.

Fourth, the *challenge*. Verse 18: “Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.” What James is saying is this: I can’t see your faith without or apart from works, but I will show or demonstrate it by my works. Not faith *plus* works, but faith *that* works. He is confirming the Apostle Paul, who wrote, “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor

uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6). Faith really is love in action. Beware of mere orthodox or intellectual faith, and of thinking you’re saved just because you’ve been raised in a Reformed church and are well versed in biblical truth. It’s very important to know the truth, but in the end, it’s not about how much you know but what you do with it.

### **By what we *Feel***

First, we consider another aspect of faith: *our feelings*. We often decide and act upon how we feel. Maybe we’re not as bold as some who say, “If it feels good, do it!” We often do know what is the right thing to say or do, but just don’t feel like saying or doing it. We then decide to speak or act against better knowledge.

When our faith is tested by our feelings or emotions, and when we are going through a rough time, we wonder if God is still present with us, because it doesn’t feel like He is. But consider how, when it’s dark outside and we cannot see or feel the sun, we still know it is there. Our faith is based on sure knowledge—not on our feelings. Of course, that does not mean true faith is without feelings, just as it is not without works. But they don’t precede faith; they follow it. They are a fruit of faith.

Second, the *assumption*. We’re all prone to evaluate what’s right and wrong by our own standards or by our own preconceived notions about it. We’re informed in part by our thinking and in part by our feelings and circumstances, past and present. I have asked people, How can you be sure about what you believe or what you’ve said or done is right? The answer I receive often is based on the assumption that what I think, know, and feel is factual and neutral, and not biased by (a lack of) upbringing and education. The problem is that then my faith is as good or as false as yours. So we all live in our own universe. The

answer should be, Let our faith and actions be according to God's Word, as we see in verse 18, "I will shew thee my faith by my works."

Third, the *example of demons*. James then tells them in verse 19, "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble." That's good, but demons or devils do, too. They not only really believe and know that God exists, but they also have feelings: they tremble or shake with fear! They cried out in Matthew 8:29, "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" Though demons have a measure of faith, even believing they will suffer in hell, they do not repent and believe in Jesus.

Fourth, the *reality of universal faith*. We all not only have faith in something or someone, but we also deep down believe in the existence of the true God but, according to Romans 1, suppress this knowledge and therefore are more foolish than demons. The demons at least have the sense to tremble with fear! We all try to fill the void with other gods or idols—something to be devoted to, whether possessions or entertainment, while we know full well it won't satisfy. According to Romans 2, we will have to give an account of our actions. Some people believe and are excited for a while but give up, and so only have a temporary faith. Others are spared in an accident or healed from cancer and have what we call a miraculous faith. All from God? Yes, but that's not saving faith. Our intellect, our mind, or our understanding and knowledge as well as our emotions, such as fear, excitement, and joy, are all involved, but they don't move our will. They don't move us to action or to works, to obedience and commitment. If it is to be true faith, it has to involve all three.

**By what we Do**

First, consider Abraham's faith and works. In verse 21, we read, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" Here the question of verse 14 ("Can faith save him?") is reworded as it worked out in Abraham's life. Once again, this is a rhetorical question, relating back to Genesis 22, where Abraham was called to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. Isaac was the child he finally received after twenty-five years of waiting, believing, and trusting. "Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be" (Rom. 4:18). In other words, faith was first! When God called Abraham from among the Gentiles (Gen. 15), he believed God and acted on it. No wonder James confirms in verse 22, "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?"

Abraham's obedience was faith in action. Faith "wrought" or worked, and so by works faith was made perfect. It did not add anything to faith; it is not faith plus works, but it was faith that works. That is the faith that saves, and it is God's work in us and by us. That's why Paul in Philippians 2:12-13 doesn't say, "*Work* your own salvation," but "*Work out* your own salvation with fear and trembling." He goes on to say, "For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." James confirmed this in verse 23: "And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God."

But then comes what people call the difficult verse (v. 24): "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." James does not contradict Paul when he says we're not justified by faith only; he's fighting a very different battle. Paul uses Abraham's example

to destroy the notion of justification by works; James uses him to illustrate the futility of dead faith. The focus is not just on faith, but on faith in God and in His Word. True saving faith involves not only the mind and the emotions, but also the will to act upon it and demonstrate it. How can Abraham be justified by works if it is by faith alone? By faith, he was justified before God (his righteousness declared), and by works he was justified before men (his righteousness demonstrated). Abraham's faith was put to the test. How does your faith test?

Second, consider Rahab's faith and works. "Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?" (v. 25). "Likewise...": it's as if James anticipates the Jews objecting, "But that was Abraham! He was special." He was a Gentile just like Rahab; one was in Mesopotamia, the other in Jericho! In other words, there's no real difference in being a patriarch or having been a prostitute. It is the same faith and the same works. As we find in Hebrews a wonderful testimony about Abraham, so also about Rahab, "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she received the spies with peace" (11:31). Hiding and helping the spies escape was an act of faith. Her faith also was demonstrated.

Third, our faith and works. James concludes in verse 26, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." We heard about Abraham and Rahab, but what about you? Your faith tested. How are you measuring up? I'm not asking if you passed this test with flying colors; but is there at least some evidence for others to see that your confession of faith isn't words only, but also enthusiasm and actions? James emphasizes that faith without works is dead, while Paul emphasizes that works without faith in Jesus Christ is unacceptable to God. Someone wrote, "Creed and conduct

cannot be separated any more than the body from its life-giving breath.” We also know what Jesus said in John 15:2: if we’re professing Christians, we are all branches in the vine, but it’s clear there are only two kinds: *fruitless* and *fruitbearing*. The first is burnt in the fire; the other is pruned so it will bring forth more fruit. How? Jesus said, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples” (John 15:7–8). Amen.