
When You Think the World Is Beyond Redemption

BOB HEERSPINK

In many ways, we separate our Christian faith from the broader world in which we live. We talk about our personal relationship with God or about Christ as our personal savior, but is it possible to see God as a God who relates to government, business, international affairs? What does Psalm 2 say about this? Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

BOB HEERSPINK

And I am Bob Heerspink.

DAVE BAST

So, Bob, I certainly would say that Jesus is personal Lord and savior, and I know you would, too; but I think what we are trying to think about today is, is he more than that? Is our faith sometimes too small? Are we boxing him in to just the Church or our family or our private lives?

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; the kind of society in which we live today, Dave, I think really pushes us to think about our Christian faith as only something that speaks to one corner of our lives. I remember talking to one businessman who said: You know, I am a Christian, but my Christian faith has nothing to say to how I go about my business. I have talked to people who say: You know, I am really uncomfortable talking about the implications of Jesus Christ for the broader world in which we live because it just seems like I am being so... well, I am being...

DAVE BAST

I know what you mean. There is a real push to privatizing faith today, and to try to say that it is not legitimate if your personal faith has broader implications for the world and for society.

BOB HEERSPINK

It is the pluralistic society in which we live, where we say you can have your personal faith...

DAVE BAST

But just keep it quiet...

BOB HEERSPINK

Keep it to yourself.

DAVE BAST

Keep it in church; keep it to yourself; but you cannot put this forward in the public square.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, we have made the Christian faith a matter of ethics – you know, how you live morally...

DAVE BAST

Personal ethics; individual ethics...

BOB HEERSPINK

Exactly; but we do not allow it to grow beyond that.

DAVE BAST

But the Christian confession... our basic faith is Jesus is Lord, and that is much more than just a personal claim; that is a cosmic claim. If Jesus is Lord, then he is Lord over everything and everyone. There is a wonderful psalm that makes this bold claim associating Jesus with the Lord God and asserting their supremacy over all things. Listen to Psalm 2:

¹Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? ²The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, ³“Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles.” ⁴The One enthroned in heaven laughs. The Lord scoffs at them. ⁵He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, ⁶“I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain.” That is the first half of Psalm 2.

BOB HEERSPINK

Now, that psalm really says we have to expand our understanding of what is going on in the world, to move beyond just horizontal relationships. You know, we read the paper and we see what is happening in the world today, and we think it is just a matter of one government relating to another, or one society taking issue with another. What this psalm is saying is that all of these world events that so often terrorize us have this vertical dimension. They relate to our God.

DAVE BAST

Well, you know, what is your reaction? How are you feeling these days when you read the headlines in the newspaper or on the Internet news site? Are you worried? Are you nervous? It seems like the world is in turmoil; that there is all kinds of chaos breaking out politically. Wars keep going on that drag us in. The economy, all of that stuff. What is your reaction? Are you scared?

BOB HEERSPINK

Exactly. Well, you know, we have this notion that if we fight one more war we are going to have peace, and it just does not happen. These hotspots break out from place to place, and at the end of the day you look at this and you say: Where is the world going? Is everything falling apart?

DAVE BAST

And meantime, I think a lot of Christians are disheartened. I think they look at a culture that has experienced radical change, where it seems like Christian mores are no longer in the ascendant, where things like marriage seem to be under attack, maybe even crumbling; fewer and fewer people committing to marriage; more and more illegitimate births; and a coarsening of culture, and they look and kind of throw up their hands and say: We are losing; or we have lost. So, what do you say? What do you think?

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, I think that kind of despair is only heightened when we keep pushing our Christian faith off into that little personal corner. If Christianity is only about me and Jesus – about my personal relationship – then I am really... when it comes to the huge issues of life, we are on our own. The answer that this psalm is giving is to say: Hey, really understand the God you worship, and really understand the dynamic that exists in the person of Jesus Christ. I think this is a hugely countercultural message. This is a shocking message for a world that really wants to say a religion is about you and your feelings – your religious feelings toward God.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely; and it is the tremendous truth that is asserted here that... Can we put it this way? God is unruffled by all of the rebelliousness and all of the turmoil that goes on down here below by all of the people who attack him – by his cultured despisers, to use a phrase; by the folks who are pumping out these atheistic manifestos laughing at God and scorning belief in him; and Christians, maybe, we get all hot and bothered, and the psalmist comes through with this majestic picture of a God who is still in control, and he starts with this question: Why are these people all raging against God and saying: We want to break his chains. We want to throw off all restraint. God himself laughs at them.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; there is a message here that says: Any kind of power that a person wields in this world, whether political, whether business power, it is all on loan from God, and everyone who has power is ultimately responsible to God. They are a steward of what God has given them – a totally different understanding than what often exists in our world today, where people say: Well, you know, power comes from the people; or power just comes from those who can grab it the most. No, everyone is responsible to God for the way in which they wield power in the world, whether they are aware of that or not.

DAVE BAST

But now, this psalm, I think, illustrates a very important principle about how we read the Old Testament, and I think we need to dig into that a little bit more. It is a bit of a complicated idea, but I think we need to see how this psalm is really talking about Jesus, and we will turn to that when we come back after a break.

Segment 2

BOB HEERSPINK

Welcome back to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Bob Heerspink, and with me is my co-host, Dave Bast.

DAVE BAST

So, Bob, let's talk a little bit about the Old Testament background of this 2nd psalm.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, this psalm is obviously a psalm that celebrates the Davidic kingship, and a psalm like this, I am sure, was read whenever a new king in David's line was installed in power in Jerusalem. I mean, the peoples around would have been looking at this change of power as a possibility to cast off the fetters of the Davidic king, and this is a warning that they need to maintain that relationship that they have with God's anointed.

DAVE BAST

Right; so we always begin with what did it mean for the original readers; and for them the anointed one who is mentioned, which of course in Hebrew is *messiah* – the Hebrew word, messiah, for anointed. The messiah would have been the new king, and these restless peoples want to throw off the yoke, and really what they are doing in saying that is they want to throw off God's yoke, which raises questions for our own culture and our own society, where it seems like so many people view freedom as an absence from any restrictions at all; from any and all restraints. Freedom means I can do totally what I want. I think one thinks the psalmist is saying is no, you cannot; that there is a God and his laws really apply.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes, I think that you have to see in this psalm that there is a throne behind the throne. You know, you've got the throne in Jerusalem of the Davidic king, but this psalm talks about the throne of God – the heavenly throne; and it actually says that there is this snicker that comes from the throne of God when he looks at people thinking that they can throw off obedience to him. You know, so often we find even ourselves... I mean, we wrestle with the fact that, hey, do I really have to do it God's way? Can't I do my own thing and it will all turn out well? And God says it is not going to work that way. This is just foolishness.

DAVE BAST

Right. You know, freedom is so much more complicated than we realize, and I think we all know that on certain levels, but we fail to see it perhaps on the big level of politics and government; that we do have to submit, and that God's law is best for us. I remember someone once challenging the old saying: You cannot legislate morality. And Martin Luther King responded: Well, you cannot legislate morality, but you can legislate against immorality. You cannot make people good, but you can restrain the evil that people would do to one another and even to themselves. So, yes, certainly the psalm begins there, but I don't think it stops there.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, just one more thing about that throne... I think it is easy to look at this and to say that there is a God in heaven that demands obedience of us. You know, that is something against which we chafe; but the truth of the matter is, this is an incredible encouragement for us Christians today, to know that there is a throne above the throne.

You know, I think of the book of Revelation, and in almost every chapter of that book, which is written to First Century Christians going under pressure and persecution, there is the mention of the throne; and it is like the scripture in Revelation – and here, too – is saying: Remember the throne. Things look out of control? Remember the throne. There is a God who sits upon the throne. That is not intimidating for us in terms of encouraging us to rebel against it; that is an encouragement.

DAVE BAST

Sure; but then, there is a deeper meaning here, or a further meaning, I think. When we think of the Lord's anointed – the Lord's messiah – obviously Christians cannot stop with one of the kings of Israel, whoever that may have been, Hezekiah or whoever, when the psalm was first written. I remember something very helpful long ago that a professor told me in seminary. When you read these prophetic passages in the Old Testament, it is like looking at a range of mountains. From a distance, it just looks like a mountain. It just looks like the immediate application in Old Testament terms; but when you actually get closer, if you could get an aerial view, you would see that it is a whole range of mountains – that there is a mountain and then a valley and then a further mountain and a further mountain – and that is how these prophetic passages work. Yes, it is about the Israelite king, but in a deeper and more long-term sense, it is about the Lord's Messiah, Jesus himself.

BOB HEERSPINK

Exactly; and that is why already, Dave, in this passage, the Davidic king can call all nations to obedience to him. You might say, well, who is this king that can simply demand other nations bow the knee to him? Well, it is because in this passage we are looking forward through salvation history to the coming of the ultimate king, for whom our hope and salvation rests, and that is the Messiah – for us, Jesus Christ.

DAVE BAST

One of the ways to read the psalms or to pray the psalms... After all, that is what this series of *Groundwork* programs is about: How we can inform our faith and deepen our faith. Because the Psalms not only give us words to pray and speak to God, but they lead us into the right channels of response. One of the ways to read them is to use a concordance and see if there are cross references to the New Testament between any psalm, because I think for Christians it is of crucial importance that we look at any places in the New Testament where the psalm is quoted or used or applied, and there is a tremendous story in Acts Chapter 4 that makes use of Psalm 2 – very instructive for us. It happens after Peter and John have been arrested and brought before the authorities in Jerusalem. You remember that story.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right, and here is the Church and they are wrestling with the response that they should make, and their confession is the words of Acts 4, that what they are experiencing in their own situation with the persecution of the political forces around them is actually those nations raging against God's anointed, namely Jesus

Christ.

DAVE BAST

Peter and John are released after they are given a warning: You had better stop preaching about Jesus. They say, famously: Should we obey God or men? You know, which is it? But then they go back to the Church and they tell what has happened, and now here is this little band of a few thousand believers, and the authorities have lined up against them, and they pray the words of Psalm 2: Lord God, they say, why do the nations rage; and then they go on to say: Indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate and the Gentiles and the people of Israel, they all conspired against your holy servant, Jesus, the anointed one. So, it is that everybody is in this against Jesus; but nevertheless, then they think of the throne and they pray this psalm and they are filled with confidence.

BOB HEERSPINK

I think again there is something here that cuts against the grain of how people typically think about Jesus Christ today. A lot of people talk about Jesus as their friend, even as their savior; but Psalm 2, and that passage from Acts 4, says Jesus is Lord; and he is not just Lord of my *personal* life – my individual life – he really is a cosmic Lord.

DAVE BAST

Yes, and listen to how this story ends. Here is the last part of their prayer in Acts 4:

²⁹Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰

Stretch out your hand to perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus. And Luke adds after that: ³¹After they prayed the place where they were meeting was shaken and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word boldly.

So, it is not: Oh, dear; we are afraid. It is filled with confidence and courage, and they bear witness to the name of Jesus.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; there is a throne above all thrones, and now there is one who has come into the world who is the King of Kings.

What that means, the implications of that, we need to... explore a little bit more.

DAVE BAST

Yes, for us personally...

BOB HEERSPINK

But we will get into that right after this break.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

Hi. Welcome back to *Groundwork*. I am Dave Bast, along with my co-host, Bob Heerspink, and Bob, I want to ask a tough question. You know, we are discussing Psalm 2 and this tremendous vision of the Lord and his anointed – the Lord Jesus – and they are ruling; there is a throne behind the throne. So what does that mean for us personally? Does that mean, first of all, let's just ask the broader question for our culture and society, does that mean that we as Christians ought to be trying to impose a Christian moral order on our countries where we live?

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, it all depends, I think, on what you mean by a "Christian moral order." In a pluralistic society we are not going to go out and seek to force people to attend church. We are not going to see the return of laws that govern Sunday observance, I assume. In that sense, we are not going to go back to the Middle Ages; but I think Christians do...

DAVE BAST

Burning people at the stake for heresy, for example; the civil authorities doing that.

BOB HEERSPINK

But we do have to stop this embarrassment that we have as Christians, to be able to speak our values and the implications of the Christian faith into our political order. Now that does not mean that we always have to vote for who we think is the most Christian candidate because maybe a person who says, “Hey, I am a Christian,” may have ideas about government that we would say that is really off the mark; but I do think we have to put the lens of the Gospel on political and national and international issues in a way that we have not done in the past.

DAVE BAST

Well, and I think it means we can argue, and ought to be arguing as Christians, in the public square for moral order and moral restraint.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

This idea that freedom means totally breaking all bonds and casting off all chains and being able to do whatever we want...

BOB HEERSPINK

Liberty is not license...

DAVE BAST

It is just bogus – yes, it is bogus.

BOB HEERSPINK

It is not license.

DAVE BAST

And people know that. I will give one example: The anti-smoking laws in public. It is known that that is bad for not only you, but it is bad for others; and therefore, it is legitimate to restrict that freedom of people that used to be taken for granted; and what is true in the physical realm can also be true in the moral realm; it is legitimate to restrict behavior that is bad for people and bad for a culture – bad for a society.

BOB HEERSPINK

So, you are saying...

DAVE BAST

Now, the debate is, what is that? Okay...

BOB HEERSPINK

Where is the line? Where is the line?

DAVE BAST

But it is fair to argue, and we have a total responsibility, I think, as Christians to argue for these things; to argue for our position, and to say: Freedom is a little bit more complicated than just saying don't put your laws on my body.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; and if you go back to Psalm 2, there is actually some application here – some advice to what all this means for us today. Let me just read the last verses of Psalm 2:

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

Now we started out saying this psalm is speaking about more than just personal faith, but in a sense we now circle back, don't we, at the end of this psalm to say: Hey, it is about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as savior and Lord that is critical to really putting on the lens of the Gospel and looking at all the world through the eyes of faith.

DAVE BAST

Well, yes; and you talk about a psalm that grabbed the attention and imagination of the first Christians in the New Testament. How about a psalm like this one that not only speaks about the Lord's anointed, but calls him the Lord's Son, and says: Today I have become your Father. So, clearly we believe this is speaking about the Lord Jesus Christ, who is not only Messiah, but Son – who is not only King, but Lord; and that it all comes down to engaging with him. What is striking to me about this is that it speaks about the anger of the Son – not just the anger of God or the Lord or the Father, but the anger of the Son. That is not something we tend to...

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, we tend to make God the Father the angry one about sin and Jesus – he just accepts everyone just the way they are; he is loving, he is kind. The notion that Jesus can get angry is not part of the average person's understanding of Christ, even though he *did* get angry on the pages of the Gospel; and it says right here in Psalm 2: There is an anger that flares against those who don't take his lordship seriously.

DAVE BAST

Well, he is holy. God is holy. The whole of God has all the attributes of God. The Father is loving and gracious, but also holy and righteous and has wrath against evil. The Son is loving and gracious, but also shares that same wrath against evil. In fact, I think one of the most chilling lines in all of the Bible... you made reference earlier to the book of Revelation, and you remember the passage in Revelation 6, where the Lord Jesus returns in glory and those who have set themselves against him cry out to the hills: Cover us; and to the rocks: Hide us; and then it adds: Hide us from the wrath of the Lamb.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

That is kind of mind-blowing... the wrath of the Lamb?

BOB HEERSPINK

The wrath of the Lamb...

DAVE BAST

Well, the Lamb is gentle and loving and he gave his life... but there is wrath there, too.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, you know, sometimes I wonder if Jesus Christ walked the halls of the United Nations and he were invited to speak to that body, what would he say? You know, I suspect he would say some pretty tough and harsh things about the way in which our world operates.

DAVE BAST

Well, I think he would cut through all the hypocrisy and he would cut against all the injustice...

BOB HEERSPINK

See, and that is the key; he would not just talk about love, but he would talk about justice in our world.

DAVE BAST

And I think he would challenge each of those individual diplomats, too. You know, it is one thing to talk in a vague way about social justice or the State or the country or the culture; but it always comes down to what about me?

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

There is a great line in Dorothy Sayers where she says somewhere: You know, why didn't God stamp out that evil? Well, then you have to ask: Why didn't God stamp out me? Because that is where it starts, all that evil that is done; it starts in *my* heart; and here is the personal question: Have you kissed the Son? Have you become reconciled to the holy, triune God through Jesus the Messiah?

BOB HEERSPINK

Because you can talk all you want about love and justice, but the power to really live that out... you know, the sacrifice that is needed, not just for us personally, but especially for our leaders, is going to be found in this relationship with Jesus Christ that really empowers them to be his kind of people in the world today.

DAVE BAST

Very true; and thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation today. Don't forget, it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keep our topics relevant to your life. So tell us what you think about what you are hearing, and suggest topics or passages you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

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