Maintaining vision in times of trouble – Psalm 2

1. Introduction

In the world today there appears to be growing opposition to the Kingdom of God. In "our" world there are few real breakthroughs, but we are beginning to see some. In post-Christian Europe there is so much unbelief and lethargy in the churches. Still about 50% of the world's population is in need of a cross-cultural witness. There is much yet to be done.

Today we will look at **vision** and particularly **maintaining vision** in times of difficulty and trouble. One of the great strategies of the Evil One is an attempt to shrink the vision of believers. So many of us arrive with great visions, but if you see us a few years later it appears that our vision has diminished or even gone. This is a major factor in attrition statistics. Perhaps even worse are workers who are like an empty shell – keeping up appearances because they can't do anything else!

So often when we talk about "having a vision", it appears we are talking about derived, secondary visions – a vision for the Nepalese or a vision to eliminate sex trafficking. Here are some of the factors that shrink vision in our hearts and lives:

- **Discouragement:** this is cumulative. We get discouraged about people, about projects we are involved in, about the apparently negligible growth in the new believers, about our fellow co-workers, about our lack of support and so on.
- **Betrayal:** this is much more serious, especially if it is your co-workers, agency or locals you trusted who have betrayed you.
- **Fatigue:** this is often caused by a failure to maintain a steady pace and a failure to deliberately have periods of relaxation and physical restoration.
- **Working outside the area of your gifting:** this is sometimes a result of "the disciplining of the Father", but more usually there is something that needs to be done and you are the only person available to do it. I have seen gifted evangelists having to spend a lot of time doing the accounts. There are exceptions to this "rule". One such would be mothers of small children. For a few years they have to devote extra time to their children, but when this time is over, their gifting kicks into action again and is as good as new.
- **Replacing revelation with reason**

How do we recover our lost vision? The answer is to focus once again on our **primary vision**.
Psalm 2 is clearly a Messianic Psalm for no earthly king is ever going to receive the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession (v. 8).

There are four "verses" in this poem:

1. Verses 1-3: a look at those who oppose the Kingdom of God – in effect a worldwide rebellion

2. Verses 4-6: the response of God to this opposition

3. Verses 7-9: the Lord lays claim to His Kingdom

4. Verses 10-12: our response to God's purposes

The First Verse: A look at those who oppose the Kingdom of God – Psalm 2:1-3

The Psalmist asks two big questions:

- **Why do the nations rage?** Or why is there so much international conflict? Or why is there so much intertribal warfare?
- **Why do the peoples plot in vain?** Or why is there so much confusion, emptiness and futility in people's lives? Why do so many leaders want to snap the bands of divine restraint? And fundamentally, why are so many leaders plotting against the Lord Jesus?

This is no 'storm in a teacup'! We should never underestimate Satan's strategies. Nora and I have lived through wars and rumours of wars in the Middle East. We were in Amman during the six-day war of June '67. We lived in Beirut 1968 to 72 when the first rounds of Israeli attacks occurred. We were in Saudi Arabia during the fall of the Shah of Iran and soon after a group took over the Great Mosque in Mecca and there was heavy fighting for days. The assumption was that it was an attempt to overthrow the House of Saud. Since 1991 and the Gulf War there has been almost continuous war in the Near East, North Africa, Yemen, Sudan, Egypt and further afield.

The word "rage" has the connotation of a raging sea. So why does this part of the world seem to be **constantly seething**? Will it ever end? What is going to happen? Is there any hope?

The second question is: why do the peoples plot in vain? Or why is there so much confusion at an individual level?

Back in England, even living in Cambridge, I am shocked by the number of people who take horoscopes seriously. Most people seem to lack any sort of ability to evaluate the latest fads. There is little or no application of logic or thinking things through to their conclusions. This is possibly the result of post-modernism. There certainly is a spiritual, social and philosophical confusion and it is growing. Many believers sense that they are going to be all right in the future, but that they personally cannot change anything now.

So one of the dangers for believers is that they adopt an attitude of calculated indifference to the world's many problems and they doubt if they can change anything.

So the Psalmist asks these two questions. He says: ***"The kings of the earth/the rulers take counsel together"*** and try to influence people in one way or another. In our generation, part of this is gaining, or at least seeking to gain, control of the mass media. The opinion makers are largely those who control the media and the goal is to exert pressure on the masses of people to do what is really consciously or unconsciously against God's will. The people learn error more than truth for fundamentally it is **"Against the Lord and His Anointed"**. Their hostility to the Lord is open. They see no reason to hide it and they don't try. So the situation that pertained about 3000 years ago is much the same today.

The "Lord (YHWH)" conveys a great sense of independence – **I AM** – a sense of self-sufficiency and the ability to do what He pleases. He is the totally unique God.

But self-sufficient and self-determining people hate such thoughts and will always oppose any God who claims to be anything other than **their puppet**. For this Lord God is implying a warning – rulers and leaders had better not confuse themselves with God and seek to take God's place. We human beings refuse to worship a completely self-sufficient God. We want to be self-determining. So we hate the thought of a God who determines our way for us! Arrogant leadership will always be opposed to any statement concerning the Lord God.

The early church in Jerusalem were the first disciples to experience this opposition from the authorities after the lame beggar was healed at the entrance to the temple and Peter and John were threatened that they must never again speak about the Lord Jesus. They went back to the other believers and they began to pray and in their prayer they quoted this passage. (Acts 4:25-26)

We know from the New Testament and early church history that for nearly 300 years the believers lived under constant harassment in the Roman Empire. The Church of the East in the Parthian Empire experienced many more centuries of attacks. Whenever the church has risen up in faith to follow the example of these early apostles, the result has been the same. And so it is today.

Note the unreasonableness of this opposition to God (v. 3)

There is a tone of astonishment in this senseless opposition to God! In verse 3, ***"Let us burst their*** (Father God and His Son the Lord Jesus) ***bonds apart and cast away their cords from us."*** What are these chains and fetters? They are the Law of God, the principles by which God deals with mankind.

So much of contemporary philosophy would say the same. The people tell us that Christian morality is harmful and Christian principles are repressive. The media is clearly insinuating that the cause of so many problems in our culture is the Christian faith. Our culture looks for freedom from God's repressive requirements. But the result is that chaos increases and a growing number of desperate people are looking for answers that their misguided leaders are not providing them with.

"By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous – God commending him by accepting his gift." (Heb. 11:4)

But men love darkness rather than light. At best we try and earn our salvation by our own methods and we hate the concept that salvation is only by faith. 1 Jn. 5:3 says, ***"And His commandments are not burdensome"***. Is a train more free to run when it is **on** a rail track or when it is **off** the rail track?

Note too the object of their opposition. (v. 3) ***"Against the Lord and against His Anointed"***. (v. 2) The great objective of Satan in his war against the Lord Jesus is to destroy His Kingdom. So the spirit of anti-christ is abroad in the world with an intense, violent, continuous opposition in an attempt to destroy God's Kingdom. Their hostility was open for they saw no reason to hide it. We should understand this hostility, because then the situation was the same as it is today.

The people of the world largely co-operate with this rebellion the very idea of a self-existent, self - dependent, totally unique God does not at all appeal to people who see themselves in these capacities. Self-sufficient man does not want to hear about a self-existent God and a completely self-determining God.

Later God asks them, exhorts them, to be wise; (v. 10) for what they want to do is stupidity. It is madness to oppose the power of God.

The Second Verse: the Response of God – Psalm 2: 4-6

How does God feel about this challenge? What is God going to do about all this? Is he wringing His hands with worry or impotence? Is He nervous that the church might fail?

v. 4 ***"He who sits in the heavens laughs"*** (!) But not in amusement! The Lord holds them in derision. He laughs at the thought that the wars and conflicts can be resolved without any reference to Him. He is deeply grieved about so many pitiful children who are refugees, who have lost a parent or two and who are growing up knowing nothing but war. God's anger is as pure as His holiness and as great

as His love. It is sometimes a sin not to be angry. If I see someone being abused and mistreated and instead of going to help, I walk away, then my lack of anger is a sin. So God's "laughter" is a dramatic use of the word to describe His imperturbable sovereignty.

Here are some examples of the 'humour' of God:

- **An example from history** – Ex. 1:22: Pharaoh's attempt to destroy the people of God was, ***"Every boy must be cast into the Nile"***. Did Pharaoh succeed? No! It was Pharaoh's own daughter who came to the rescue. It was this little baby, Moses, who later delivered God's people from Egypt.
- **Many situations in the world today**: there was great persecution of the believers in China for over 60 years, yet today the number of believers in China makes the church in China the largest church in the world.
- **A look at the future**

  "Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet and there were loud voices in heaven saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah and He shall reign for ever and ever'. And the 24 elders … fell on their faces before God and worshipped Him saying, 'We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for You have taken Your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath came ….. for destroying the destroyers of the earth."

So here we are in the midst of a very great story, but we can read the end. It has already been written. It all ends well. God wins!

Whatever you do, don't have God against you and, if God is for us, what does it matter who is against us?!

God also speaks (v. 5)

He not only laughs, He speaks, ***"As for Me, I have set My King on Zion, My holy hill."*** His answer to all the threats through time is "The Word of God" – the Lord Jesus. [See Jn. 1:1-5]

There is a lovely example in Jn. 18:6. It is an account of the betrayal of Jesus by Judas. The Lord Jesus asks the soldiers who have come to arrest him, ***"Whom do you seek?"***. The soldiers reply, ***"Jesus the Nazarene"***. Then the Lord Jesus says, ***"I am"*** (the great name of God in the Old Testament) and as a result of this great revelation all the soldiers fall flat on the ground.

So God's answer to the kings of the earth is, "I have already done what you are trying to prevent! I have installed my King upon my holy hill."

Note the contrast between the kings of the earth who set themselves up and the King whom God has appointed. The Lord Jesus, the one who humbled Himself, will be exalted far, far above all.

The Third Verse: the Lord Jesus lays claim to the Kingdom – Psalm 2: 9

It is a threefold claim:

- **By divine decree** (v. 7)

  The essence of spiritual warfare is seen by comparing verses 2 and 3 with verses 7 and 8. The Messiah, the Lord Jesus, was declared to be the Son of God according to the New Testament by His resurrection from the dead. Paul was preaching in Antioch in Pisidia. He began to share the Gospel in the synagogue (Acts 13:33). Having explained the death of Jesus on the Cross and His burial in

the tomb and the fact that God raised Him from the dead (v. 30), he says in v. 33, ***"God did this to fulfil His promise to the fathers*** (of the Jewish people) ***that He has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus from the dead as it is written in Psalm 2:7"***.

This is repeated in Rom. 1:4, ***"… and (He) was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of Holiness by His resurrection from the dead – Jesus Christ our Lord…."***. This is confirmed again in Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5.

This is the basis of our commission in Mt. 28:19-20, ***"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ……"***

- **By divine inheritance** (v. 7)

  "The Father loves the Son and has given <u>all things</u> into His hand." (Jn. 3:35)

  This includes the gift of all the nations! The nations' rebellion will one day end and they will be brought into subjection to the King. Ps. 72:8 says***, "May He have dominion from sea to sea and from the river*** (Euphrates) ***to the ends of the earth"***. Zech. 9:10 says, ***" … and He will speak peace to the nations; His rule shall be from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth"***.

- **By divine authority and divine power** (v. 9)

  How can we have a realistic view of our world situation? Some people appear to be very pessimistic. Others are starry-eyed optimists. Our view should be realistic as we see the world in the light of heaven, as we see man in the light of God and human impotence in the light of divine power! This is really a very great privilege, but it brings with it a great responsibility!

  "Then I saw heaven opened and behold a white horse! The One sitting on it is called Faithful and True and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire and on His head are many diadems and He has a name written that no one knows but Himself … and the name by which He is called is the Word of God. And the armies of heaven arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword with which He will strike down the nations and He will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On His robe and on His thigh He has a name written – King of Kings and Lord of Lords." (Rev. 19:11-16) [See also Psalm 45]

Is this your picture of what the Lord Jesus will do?

The Fourth Verse: Our Response – Psalm 2:10-12

- **Learn to be wise!** Being wise means taking very seriously God's role in the affairs of men and being warned! Lay down your weapons before it is too late!
- **Learn to worship God**. Humble yourself before Him. Bow at His feet in complete submission and serve Him with gladness of heart. It is vanity – sheer madness – to oppose the One who laughs. So lay down your self-centred weapons before it is too late. We must learn to worship and this involves militant joy – triumphant, joyful praise.
- **Do homage to the Son**. Acknowledge His complete authority over your life to be part of His purposes in the world.
- **Take refuge in Him** (v. 12). In times of satanic opposition and in fact at all times, **take refuge in God for this is the way to be truly blessed.**