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Psalm 2:12

The Conquering Love of God

PSALM 2 • THE CROSS • THE LAMB



STUART GREAVES

Before this age is over, the church will speak of Jesus in ways that will astonish the hearts of nations.

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In the face of a Roman cross, the Jewish Messiah made one of the most audacious claims in Scripture: “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” The statement is not consolation after the fact. It is the declaration of a conquest already secured by the pathway of the cross.

Psalm 2 opens with a question that still echoes across the centuries: “Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing?” Heaven’s interpretation of the emotional posture of the earth is rage, deep, settled disagreement with God’s ways, God’s leadership, and God’s choice of the ultimate King of the nations. 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 bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us.”

Yet the same psalm unfolds a set of profoundly contrasting emotions. There is the rage of the nations. There is the Father’s holy laughter and derision at the futility of that rebellion. There is the tender, thunderous decree spoken over the Son: “You are My Son, today I have begotten You.” There is the fierce authority of the Messiah who will break the nations with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel. And the psalm ends with the fearful, joy-filled invitation to the wise: serve the Lord with fear, rejoice with trembling, kiss the Son. It is a short psalm, only twelve verses, but it is a roller coaster of divine emotion and human response.

The central paradox is almost offensive to natural reasoning. The Father turns to the Son and says, “Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession.” The nations He offers as the Son’s inheritance are the very nations filled with rage against Him. It is as if the Father says, “Son, I love You so much, here is a fixer-upper.” What does that reveal about the heart of God? What does He see in the human race that the best gift He can present to His beloved Son is a world that is dark, dying, and violently opposed to Him? The question of Psalm 8 rises unbidden: “What is man that You are mindful of him?”

One of the gifts of lingering in this psalm is that it begins to expose the same rage in subtler forms. The rage of the nations is not only “out there” in secular culture or hostile governments. It surfaces in our own conversations with family and friends, and it can hide inside the church itself. While studying the psalm I found profound pockets of disagreement with God in my own heart, places where I preferred my own ways, my own timing, and my own definitions of love and justice. The psalm is designed to align us. It is an invitation worth taking: set aside time, perhaps once a week for a month, to sit with these twelve verses and ask the Lord to let the psalm do the work for which it was written.

The Decree That Raised the Dead

In Acts 13 Paul is preaching the gospel in a synagogue. When he reaches the resurrection he declares that God has fulfilled the promise made to the fathers by raising Jesus, “as it is also written in the second Psalm: ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You.’” The technical term is allusion. By quoting that single line, Paul calls

the entire psalm to mind for his Jewish hearers. The resurrection is the moment the Father's decree thundered over the Son.

For thirty-three years the challenge had followed Jesus wherever He went: If You are the Son of God… If You are the Son of God… The question was flung at Him by the devil in the wilderness, by the crowds, by the religious leaders, and finally by the mockers at the foot of the cross. He dies. He is taken down from the tree and laid in a tomb. On the third day the Father speaks: You are My Son. The power of that affection broke the power of death. The Song of Solomon is right, love is as strong as the grave. The Father's love is stronger. The very affection of the Father in that decree loosened the grip of death on the Son of God.

Psalm 2 and Psalm 110 are the two most frequently referenced psalms in the New Testament. Both magnify the beauty, majesty, and authority of Jesus in ways that fill the heart with wonder. Together they are essential to understanding the gospel of the kingdom. The gospel is not only the message of forgiveness offered to the world, though it is that first and foremost. It is also the message that interprets what is happening in the world and where history is going. It is the only true hope, joy, and peace available to the human race. Especially in seasons of political intensity, the church needs the reminder that there is a sovereign King already seated on the throne and a much larger narrative underway than any election cycle can contain.

John 3:16 remains the most treasured summary of the gospel: God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. There is a companion truth less often noticed. God so loved His Son that He gave Him the world. Everything unfolding in history is the Father forming and fashioning the storyline so that the Son receives the inheritance He deserves. Psalm 2 is the conquering love of God, how the jealous, holy affection of the Father for the Son overcomes the rage of the nations and ultimately brings those nations into the very love that flows between Father and Son.

Five Dimensions of the Cross

To understand that conquering love we must recover a fuller vision of the cross. Most believers rightly begin with the event itself and with the gift of atonement, the forgiveness of sins purchased by the shed blood of Christ. Those two realities are foundational and must never be diminished. The blood cleanses the conscience. It gives access into the Holiest. It is the power that demons still fear. Yet the New Testament presents at least three further dimensions that are often left underdeveloped.

Third, the cross is the revelation of the nature and glory of God. In John 17:1 Jesus prays, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You." Throughout John's Gospel "the hour" is a consistent reference to the hour of His death. The cross is the moment the Son is put on full display, and in that display the Father Himself is revealed. Paul calls the message of the cross foolishness, the Greek word is the root of our word "moron", to those who are perishing. It is so contrary to natural wisdom that if the rulers of that age had understood the implications of what they were doing, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Their act was the strategic equivalent of a king making the single move that guaranteed his own defeat.

Fourth, the cross is victory. Many still treat the death of Jesus as a temporary defeat that was reversed three days later by the resurrection. Scripture will not allow that framing. When Jesus cried “It is finished” and gave up His spirit with a loud voice, heaven was already triumphing. Colossians 2:15 declares that at the cross He disarmed principalities and powers and made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. The early church held this emphasis strongly; Gustaf Aulén later recovered it under the name Christus Victor. The prophetic message of the triumph of the death of Christ remains rare in the church, yet it is essential. Until we are convinced that the cross itself was victory, we will continue to resist the call to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him. We will cling to self-justification and to the righting of every wrong committed against us.

Fifth, the cross is a pattern for life. First Peter 2:21 states it without any softening: “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.” The example is painfully specific. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously. The impulse to retaliate did not even exist in the atmosphere of His soul. That same atmosphere is what the church is summoned to carry in an increasingly hostile generation. One practical test of counsel is whether it leads us toward the cross or simply confirms what we already wanted to hear. The cross is at once the payment for sin, the source of wisdom, the model for discipleship, God’s cosmic solution that reconciles heaven and earth, the decisive answer to the power of evil, the end of social hostilities, and the propitiation that turns away wrath.

“In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

, John 16:33

Preparing the Disciples for the Scandal

John 12 is the turning point of the Fourth Gospel. From that chapter forward the dominant theme is Jesus’ departure to the Father through the cross. John deliberately links the moment to Isaiah 53 and Isaiah 6. The prophet who saw the Lord high and lifted up, the train of His robe filling the temple, later discovered the greatest surprise of his life: the enthroned One is the pierced Servant. The doorway to everlasting rule over the nations was the pathway of being slain.

In the upper room (John 13–17) Jesus prepares His disciples for the necessity of His death and for their own coming suffering, betrayal, rejection, and even martyrdom. The announcement dashed their spiritual, personal, and national hopes. They had left everything to follow Him. They had received promises of thrones and a share in the administration of the Messiah’s kingdom. Now their King was speaking of a cross at the hands of the very authorities they expected Him to overthrow. Sorrow, grief,

anxiety, and fear flooded them. Peter rebuked Him. The whole company was exceedingly sorrowful. Many believers today experience similar emotions when they hear of the pressures Scripture says will precede the Lord's return. The same misplaced hopes and self-interest can make the message feel devastating. John 13–17 is written precisely to equip the heart with comfort, assurance, hope, and courageous joy in the face of that pressure.

There is a beautiful poetry in the narrative. In John 12 Mary sits at Jesus' feet and pours out her devotion, preparing Him for burial. In John 13 Jesus turns the picture around, kneels at the disciples' feet, and begins to show them the full extent of His love. The One who is about to die is already pouring His life out for them.

The Audacious Claim

Then comes the closing word of the upper-room discourse, one of the most remarkable statements in the Bible. Standing on the threshold of the scandal of a Roman cross, the Jewish Messiah declares: "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

The Roman army was the superpower of the age. A single trained soldier was expected to hold a defined space against overwhelming numbers. Rome reserved crucifixion for slaves, rebels, and the worst criminals, an intentionally shameful, public, protracted death. Jesus knows that is the path in front of Him. He has been telling the disciples for days that they themselves will be hated, expelled from synagogues, and killed by people who think they are serving God. And then He says, in effect, "I have already conquered the world. Take courage from that fact." The peace He promises is found in the trinitarian dialogue, abiding in the love of the Father and the Son by the Spirit. Engaging that conversation produces the courage the hour requires.

The march of suffering looked to Israel and to the disciples like the walk of shame and defeat. Jesus understood that He was triumphing every single step of the way toward His death. Foxe's Book of Martyrs records the final journey of the apostle Andrew. As he was led to the place of execution and saw the cross waiting for him, he never changed expression nor stumbled in his words. "O cross, most welcome and longed for," he said, "with a willing mind, joyfully and desirously I come to you, being the scholar of Him who did hang on you, because I have always been your lover and yearn to embrace you." That is the fruit of a heart that has truly grasped the victory of the cross.

Revelation 5: The Lamb Who Prevails

The full weight of Jesus' claim in John 16:33 is expounded most clearly in Revelation 5. An angel issues a challenge to the entire created order: "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" Who is qualified to take the title deed of the earth and to share that leadership with redeemed humanity? A search is made in heaven, on earth,

and under the earth. No one is found worthy. John weeps with brokenhearted intensity. The hope of history appears to hang in the balance.

Then one of the elders speaks: “Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll.” When John turns to look, he does not see a lion in strength. He sees a Lamb standing as though it had been slain. The emphasis falls on the manner of the victory. He prevailed by being slain. The scars are the qualification. He walks to the throne and takes the scroll from the right hand of the One who sits upon it. None of the great emperors, generals, or conquistadors of history qualified. The beaten, crucified Jewish carpenter is the only One found worthy. The same path, the path of the cross, becomes the path of the saints who will reign with Him in the age to come.

It is worth pausing over the difference between resuscitation and resurrection. Others in Scripture were raised from the dead, yet they died again. Resurrection is of a different order. Mortality is swallowed up by immortality. Death is driven out of the body entirely. The resurrection of Jesus is therefore not merely the reversal of a tragedy; it is the beginning of the ending of this present age and the birthing of the age to come, which will reach its full manifestation when He returns to Jerusalem. The main exhortation of the book of Revelation is to overcome. The same note sounds throughout the first letter of John. To overcome is to triumph and conquer, by the grace of God and the power of the cross, over the world, the flesh, and the devil. It is the first commandment kept in first place. It is the pursuit of wholehearted obedience made possible only because Jesus is the conquering Lamb.

Kindness and Severity Held Together

Psalm 2 will not permit us to separate the tender affection of the Father for the Son from the severity of the judgment the Son will administer. The One who was crushed under the wrath of God on the cross is the same One who will rule the nations with a rod of iron. Psalm 7:11 says God is angry with the wicked every day, a verse we rarely put on the refrigerator, yet it stands in the same canon as John 3:16. In Athens Paul declares that God has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained, and He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead. The empty tomb in the Middle East is a permanent, public announcement: judgment is coming. The celebration of the resurrection is also an announcement of coming justice.

Romans 11:22 urges us to behold both the kindness and the severity of God. The more clearly we see His kindness, the more we understand that His severity is right. The more clearly we see His severity, the more we marvel at the wonder of His kindness. The cross reveals both at once. The rage of the nations drove Jesus to the cross. Acts 4 tells us that the same rage continues to fuel persecution against the church. At the end of the age it will culminate under the leadership of the most evil ruler the world has ever seen, filled with the fury of Satan himself.

Yet the Holy Spirit's primary agenda has never changed. He is committed to taking men and women who were once enraged against the Son and setting the seal of the Father's own love for the Son upon their hearts. That is the heart of evangelism: declaring the Father's affection for Jesus until others are captured by it. Romans 5:5 declares that the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. That love is not first our love for God; it is the Father's love for the Son now shared with us. Jesus prayed in John 17:26 that the love with which the Father loved Him might be in us, and that He Himself might be in us. Psalm 2 is designed to grow exactly that love. The first commandment is not optional. The Father insists that we love His Son with the same quality of affection He Himself possesses. Our human zeal is far too weak. Even the most radical among us fall short of the standard, because God Himself is the standard. Only the Spirit can pour out that love.

The Response the Psalm Requires

What, then, is the response Psalm 2 requires of us? "Serve the Lord with fear." The first and most fundamental way we serve is by sitting before Him and receiving, receiving His love, His grace, His wisdom, His peace. From that place of received life the works of the kingdom can flow with authenticity. "Rejoice with trembling." Enjoy Him. Receive the divine loyal affection of the Father for the Son and let it become joy. "Kiss the Son." Give Him your affection and loving obedience (John 14:23). As we receive the Father's loving commitment for Jesus, we return that affection to Him in obedient worship (John 4:23–24) and then extend it to one another and even to a hostile world.

Before this age is over, the church will speak of Jesus in ways that will astonish the hearts of nations. Paul said that grace was given to him to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ. He needed supernatural help to articulate what he was experiencing. Charles Wesley felt the same limitation: "O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise." There are not enough tongues. The Father's zeal is that the beauty of His Son will be experienced and declared by people who were once part of the raging nations.

The gospel remains the only true hope, joy, and peace available to the human race. It interprets the rage of the nations, the kindness and severity of God, the victory of the cross, and the certainty of the coming kingdom. It invites us into the holy affection that has forever flowed between the Father and the Son, and then sends us into a hostile world as those who have already overcome, because the Lamb has overcome.

That is the conquering love of God. That is the glory of the conquering Lamb.

Discussion Questions

1. **List** the contrasting emotions and responses found in Psalm 2.
2. **Identify** the five dimensions of the cross presented in the teaching.
3. **Describe** the significance of the Father's decree "You are My Son" in relation to the resurrection.
4. **Summarize** the central paradox of Psalm 2 regarding the nations as the Son's inheritance.
5. **Explain** the difference between viewing the cross as a temporary defeat versus viewing it as victory (Christus Victor).
6. **Clarify** how the rage of the nations in Psalm 2 can appear in subtler forms within the church or in personal life.
7. **Apply** Jesus' claim in John 16:33 ("I have overcome the world") to a current area of personal pressure or tribulation.
8. **Demonstrate** how the pathway of the cross becomes the pattern for the saints who will reign with Him.
9. **Show** how the kindness and severity of God are held together at the cross and in Romans 11:22.
10. **Apply** the invitation of Psalm 2 ("serve the Lord with fear, rejoice with trembling, kiss the Son") to one concrete area of your walk with Jesus this week.

Father, we thank You for the conquering love that flows between You and Your Son. Open our eyes to see the victory of the cross, the beauty of the Lamb, and the invitation of Psalm 2. Pour out the love with which You have loved Jesus into our hearts by Your Spirit, that we may serve You with fear, rejoice with trembling, and kiss the Son. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Psalm 2:12

"Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance."

Psalm 2:8

The nations the Father gives the Son are the same nations that rage against Him. This short study sits with that paradox: the conquering love of God, the victory of the cross, and the Lamb who prevailed by being slain.

Drawn from Psalm 2, John 16, and Revelation 5, these pages recover five dimensions of the cross and call the church to serve the Lord with fear, rejoice with trembling, and kiss the Son.

Includes discussion questions for personal study or a small group.

A study in Psalm 2, the Cross, and the Lamb who overcame the world.