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Sermon 25 July 2021

Title: Psalm Beach 2 (Coronation Day)

- Good morning church and welcome to week 2 of our virtual holiday to Psalm Beach. We know that you have a choice when it comes to how and where you spend your virtual vacation time, and we are thankful that you have chosen to spend it with us—we hope that your journey is a rejuvenating and reviving one as together we explore the Gateway to the Tehillim. We welcome those who are travelling with us via the LargsNaz Sunday Brunch, and also those who are joining us online all across the globe. Wherever you are, we're glad you're here with us, and we hope that you are blessed by what you see and hear this morning.
- Last week we began our Psalm Beach journey at the beginning, with Psalm 1—and we had an Orientation Day—a time to get acquainted with how this series would work and what you could expect—and we also talked about what “orientation” means when we use it to describe what certain psalms are about.
- And our place of departure, Psalm 1, we pointed out, functioned as an introduction to the Book of Psalms—but it's not just Psalm 1 that functions as an introduction, a kind of preface, to the rest of the book, but Psalm 2 as well—because Psalm 1 and 2 are connected in some very interesting ways way. One of them is this. You'll remember last week that Psalm 1 began with

the phrase “Happy are those who”—that’s what we call a “beatitude”—like the beatitudes that Jesus gives us in the gospels when he says “blessed are those who—those who weep, those who make peace, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness”—and so Psalm 1 begins with a beatitude, “happy are those who.” And you’ll remember that the word for “happy” there was “*esher*,” —that was in the Psalm Beach phrase book last week, and it’s there again today—and *esher* didn’t just mean happy but connoted moving forward, advancing—so that the psalmist is not just telling us about the emotional state of the righteous, not just about the way they feel, but the psalmist is giving us an indication that the righteous are in motion, that they are progressing—moving forward—they are getting somewhere—they have a destination and they are on the path that will lead them there.

- So that sentiment, that beatitude, begins Psalm 1—and if we look at the very end of Psalm 2, verse 12, the very last verse, we find there another beatitude, another “happy are those” statement, because in verse 12 of chapter 2 we read “Happy are all who take refuge in Him”—in the Lord, in Yahweh—and here again the word that the psalmist uses is “*esher*,”---happy, yes, but not happy a way that would imply that the righteous have found a refuge where they can cease their journey, a place where they can stop and stay put—no, just as Psalm 1 tells us that God watches over the WAY of the righteous—over the path that they travel, so here there is refuge on the way, in the journey—and the psalmist in fact just a few words into verse 12 of chapter 2 contrasts that with the wicked who kindle God’s wrath and perish IN THE

WAY—these are the same wicked that Psalm 1 has told us are like the chaff that the wind drives away--and so they will not stand in the judgement nor in the congregation of the righteous—they will perish on the way, they will not make it to the promised destination that they could have reached.

- And so the beatitudes at the beginning of Psalm 1 and at the end of Psalm two act like bookends, as a kind of envelope into which these two Psalms fit—these 2 beatitudes are a signal to the reader that Psalms 1 and 2 fit together to form a preface to the rest of the book.
- And you may remember that the central theme of Psalm 1 was that there were two very contrasting ways that a person can live, 2 very different paths that a person can take—the way of the wicked on the one hand, and the way of the righteous on the other. The righteous, we saw, are those who meditate on God's torah day and night, who recite it and pray it and live by it and internalize its guidance and direction, and they are like trees planted by streams of water, bringing forth fruit and prospering, advancing, moving forward, making progress, in all that they do—but the wicked are not so—their path leads to destruction.
- And as we move from Psalm 1 into Psalm 2, we see that same theme of the two paths, the two ways of living, expanded from focusing on the individual—on the way that a single person, or individual people, can be wicked or righteous to the way that a nation, a whole people, can choose one of two paths as well---and the two paths are the same in Psalm 1 and 2—the way of the righteous, the way that God ordains and blesses, or the way of the

wicked, the way that rebels and demands its own way contrary to the way of Yahweh and his people and his chosen King.

- And so Psalm 2 is also about two kinds of Kings—two kinds of rulers—there is God’s king, God’s chosen, even begotten, Messiah, and in opposition to Him, other conniving and conspiring rulers of this world.
- We said last week that Psalm 1 was an example of a Wisdom Psalm—the kind of psalm that when you look at its content, talks about the way that things are ordered, and predictable and harmonious and equitable—God’s in his heaven and all is right with the world—the righteous are happy and prosper while the wicked do not—and we can find that same kind of “orientation” theme here in Psalm 2—even though the wicked rulers may conspire against God’s way, there is no crisis, no need for alarm—in fact God laughs in derision at their futile efforts—things are going to be ok because God and his king are in charge and God will execute justice swiftly—so even though we find those same “wisdom” themes in Psalm 2 in terms of its content, Psalm 2 is typically categorized not as a wisdom psalm, but as a royal psalm. And it is characterized as a royal psalm not because of its content, not because of what it says, but because of its context—the way that it was used and the things that were happening when it was read or sung or referred to. Psalm 2 is a royal psalm.
- A royal psalm. Now I get the feeling that those of you who are watching who are from the UK or from places in Europe will be more familiar, and more comfortable with the concept of royalty—and with the term “royal.” Since

we've lived in the UK Pastor Tasha and I hear the word "royal" pretty much every day—maybe several times a day—it is a part of our everyday life—we can't go 24 hours without hearing or reading or talking about the Royal Mail, or the Royal infirmary, or the Royal Bank of Scotland—these are very common phrases, you know—but the word royal, and the idea of royalty are not things that Americans are particularly acquainted with—now some of us might SAY that we're fascinated the royals, but what fascinates us is their foreign-ness, their unfamiliarity—we might have sat glued to our TVs when Charles and Diana or Will and Kate got married, or when Prince Harry talked to Oprah, but I remember when Prince Philip died most of my American friends thought he must have been the Queen's son, and they found the fact that he was her husband but he wasn't called "king," very confusing—because the truth of the matter is that we Americans know more about royalty because of Disney than because of any actual monarchy—we can name probably half a dozen Disney princesses, but we couldn't name more than 2 or three real ones—when we hear somebody talk about the "Royals," we're more likely to assume that they're talking about the baseball team, the Kansas City Royals than about anyone in the House of Windsor—and I had to look that up to make sure I was using that term correctly, if I'm honest—you know, about the only "royal" thing I remember hearing much about growing up in the Southern US was "Royal Crown Cola"—"RC." If you're at the Sunday Brunch you'll see my Royal Crown Cola cooler on the stage today. So anyway, we Americans don't have the kind of context that folks from other countries

might have when we hear that Psalm 2 is a “royal psalm.” But that doesn’t mean that we can’t understand what that means—because we are not bound to our individual contexts, we can understand, if we are open to doing so, things that are outside of our limited experience and knowledge—we can come to understand contexts that are not our own—and we can apply things to our own contexts. But that does take some effort.

- And the context that a “royal psalm” is defined by is the context of some event in the life of the Davidic monarchy—an event in the life of a Hebrew king in the line of David—like a battle, or, a procession, or, as we see in Psalm 2, a coronation.
- Psalm 2 would have been used, most scholars agree, in the ceremony surrounding the installation of a new king of Israel—or in the celebration of the anniversary of the day that King became King. It might have been used at other times as well, during festivities that centered on the role of the King
- And so last Sunday was “orientation day,” but this Sunday is “coronation day,”-- but Psalm 2 isn’t just about the king who is crowned, it is about that King’s relationship to other rulers—to other nations in the world, and more importantly—that King’s covenant relationship to Yahweh, who guides and directs the people under the King’s reign, and whose will the King seeks to live out, as he pursues righteousness and justice and peace—ideally at least—history teaches us that Kings did not always live up to that standard. But Psalm 2 is about the ideal—it’s about the way Kings of Israel ought to be, remembering their covenant with God, and it’s a warning to the nations of

the world that they also ought to pay attention to God's law, and to the King that God has ordained to carry out His purposes.

- The psalmist tells us about this King, and Yahweh, and these other rulers and nations in 4 fairly simple stanzas.
- The first stanza, verses 1 through 3, reads like it could have been written yesterday—because it's still a relevant and accurate description of the world we live in—here we see that the wicked from Psalm 1 who disregard God's direction have now become the nations and their rulers, and the psalmist asks the powerful question WHY—why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain—for nothing—for no good reason? Why do these rulers and the peoples set themselves against BOTH the Lord AND his anointed and say “we're going to do things our own way—we won't be constrained and restricted by some archaic set of regulations and rules”—sounds familiar, doesn't it?
- Now we'll unpack a lot more about these stanzas tonight at the Second Helping Bible study but I do want to point out just a few details that are worth mentioning
- First of all, just a note about the poetic structure that we see here—if you look at your sermon notes you'll notice as you read through this psalm how the psalmist has used “couplets” to emphasize several points, and also to provide a sense of rhythm to the psalm—what I mean by this is notice how often the psalmist says something, and then basically says it again in a slightly different way—so we see “why do the nations conspire—and then

and the peoples plot in vain—same idea—and then the kings of earth set themselves—AND the rulers take counsel together—same basic meaning—and then what do these rulers and kings say? Another couplet: Let us burst their bonds asunder—AND cast their cords from us—we see this couplet pattern again and again through the psalm—saying something, then reiterating it

- Secondly, I want you to notice the word that the psalmist uses in verse 1 that is translated as “nations”—that word is *goyim*—the singular is *goy*—that’s in your phrasebook today--and it can mean nations or peoples in general, and sometimes it refers to the people of Israel, but particularly in modern Yiddish, even among English-speaking Jews, the word “goy” is used to refer to those who are not Jewish, or sometimes in a derogatory way someone who is not considered to be a “good Jew” for some reason might be called a “goy,” and so *goy* or *goyim* will also be translated as “Gentiles,” to specifically refer to those who are not the people of Israel, even, as is the case here, those who are at odds with the Lord and His anointed.
- The Hebrew word there for anointed, by the way, is *mashiach*—a word that refers to someone who is consecrated, a priest or king appointed by divine command—it’s also the word for Messiah—the word used for THE Messiah. *Mashiach*.
- And one last thing about this first stanza and the artistry with which the psalmist has constructed it—another way that the psalmist has connected psalm 1 and psalm 2—and it’s actually a detail that is completely lost in

translation—you don't see it in English—and it's this—in verse 1 the psalmist asks “why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain”—and that word “plot” there—the Hebrew is “*hagah*.” And what it literally means is to speak out loud in a low voice—the way a person might grumble under their breath—it a kind of muttering—so you can imagine someone plotting in that way, scheming—talking to themselves as they devise some devious plan of action—but what is interesting about this word “*hagah*” here at the very beginning of Psalm 2 is that we also see this same word at the beginning of Psalm 1, where we read that the righteous meditate on the law of the Lord day and night—as we pointed out last week, to meditate there literally means to recite and to speak aloud as one ponders—because the word that is translated as “meditates” in Psalm 1 is the very same word, “*hagah*” as the word that is translated as “plot” in Psalm 2—in other words, what the righteous individual in Psalm 1 and the unrighteous peoples in Psalm 2 are DOING—*hagah*—is the same thing—but the way they are doing it, the reason they are doing it, and the goal toward which they are doing it, are very different—the righteous is doing it to draw closer to God, to honor and enact His will, while the unrighteous are doing it to break free from what is understood as bondage to God's will—and to do things their own way—again, a contrast that you'd miss in the English translation, but one that is revealed when you consider the original Hebrew context

- Now let's move on quickly to stanza 2. The psalmist has told us about the insubordinate nations and their leaders, and now tells us about God's

response. And if you're following along in your listening guide, you'll see that the psalmist does so with 2 more couplets. (1) God, who sits in heaven laughs—(2) He has them in derision—another way to translate that is that God sits and scoffs at them—which may remind you that in Psalm 1 it was the wicked who sit and scoff at the things of God—but here the situation is reversed, and so God (1) speaks to them in His wrath, He (2) terrifies them in His fury—and what happens next—does God rain fire down from heaven? Does he flood the whole world? Does he unleash utter destruction upon these rebellious *goyim*? No, God speaks—and when He speaks He directs their attention to the King, saying “I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.” It's coronation day—

- and then in stanza 3 we hear the voice of the king, who says “Let me tell you what God has decreed—he said to me that I was his son—that on this coronation day He had begotten me, and if I'd ask, all the world would be my possession—and I will break them into bits like pieces of pottery—smashing them with a rod of iron”—scholars tell us that this is a reference to the royal scepter that is wielded by the King---a symbol of the unbreakable power of a God-ordained monarch and the way that earthly political systems—like perishable potter's vessels made of clay—are laid to waste when they come up against the imperishable strength of this divine appointment—the potters' vessels crumble—and if you're at our Sunday Brunch you now understand the name of one of today's menu items

- The psalm concludes with the 4th stanza where a warning to the rulers of the world is couched in more couplets—a warning to serve the Lord with reverence and fear, to offer Him respect—and not only Yahweh but also his emissary on Earth, the King, or you will kindle God’s wrath and destruction will follow.
- Now here in this 4th stanza, there is a problematic little phrase, *nashqu bar*, that we’ll talk more about at Second Helping, but I’m sure you noticed that Pastor Tasha left those words in the original Hebrew and didn’t read the English—and the reason for that is that you can find 3—at least 3—different ways of translating those words. The NRSV—that’s the version Pastor Tasha read from, says “kiss his feet,” so verse 11 and the beginning of verse 12 become: Serve the Lord with fear, with trembling 12 kiss his feet, or he will be angry—now that makes sense when you consider it in the context of the act of demonstrating subservience to a monarch by, whether symbolically or actually, kissing their feet—Assyrian kings were greeted this way—and so in that context, it makes sense to translate *nashqu bar* into “kiss his feet”—
- however, some versions of the Christian Bible, and most Jewish sources translate it as “embrace discipline,” or “accept correction” or “do homage in purity” —Robert Alter, who is about as much of an expert as you can be, translates it as “with purity be armed,” because *bar* could mean instruction or discipline, and *nashqu* can mean not only to kiss, but also to give respect to, or to wield—to carry like a weapon—and if you consider that in this Psalm, the nations of the world and their rulers are being told to follow God’s

laws, then “embracing discipline” or “arming yourself with purity” instead of plotting against God and His king makes sense in that context.

- But most Christian Bibles, like the King James, and the NIV, and the ESV, and the American Standard Version, they translate *nashqu bar* as “kiss the Son—s-o-n” because earlier in the psalm the King is referred to as God’s son, and so that makes sense in that context—Eugene Peterson, in his Message translation, goes with “kiss Messiah.”
- And so all of that—all that the psalmist writes in those 4 stanzas—this poetic depiction of the relationship between God and his anointed king and the nations of the world—and this warning to the nations and to the rulers of the world—to the *goyim*—that they need to stop rebelling against the things of God and pay respect to Yahweh and his King—that is the Old Testament context—
- Now when you consider who the psalmist is speaking to-- and what the psalmist is saying—this is a bold proclamation—this is not just a bit of pretty liturgy for a ceremony, not just some flowery words for a royal occasion, for Coronation Day—Psalm 2 is prophetic—it lays down the law and calls the world—the whole world—to straighten up and get on the right path and acknowledge the authority of the one that God has put in place or face judgment—there is nothing timid or even very nuanced about Psalm 2—it is the kind of proclamation that is spoken with boldness—God has put his King in place and you are called to turn from your wicked ways and follow His direction—and these bold, prophetic words would have been a part of the

activities associated with a coronation day or its anniversary for any number of kings over the years

- But the Ancient Hebrew, the Old Testament, context, is not the only context into which Psalm 2 fits, or the only set of circumstances in which one might hear the words of Psalm 2
- Because Psalm 2 is more than once recalled in the New Testament—and one of the places that happens is in Acts chapter 4, where we find that the new believers, the new Christians who were in Jerusalem—who had seen the power of the Holy Spirit and Pentecost, who had seen the signs and wonders that were being done by the disciples, who had heard the way that Peter and John spoke with power and boldness to the authorities—to the rulers of the people—and these believers in Acts Chapter 4, they say, “man, we need that kind of boldness when we speak,” and so they pray, and as they pray, they remember Psalm 2, and we read in Acts 4 beginning with verse 25--- ‘Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples imagine vain things? 26 The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers have gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah.’
- And then they put the psalmist’s words into their own context, and they say “right here in this very city, the rulers and the peoples—Herod and Pontius Pilate and the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel gathered together against God’s appointed King, God’s anointed one, God’s Messiah, God’s own begotten Son”—and so they pray just as the psalmist had written that God would look at the threats and the schemes and the plots of their opposition

and would grant them the power to speak with boldness--They prayed that God would stretch out his hand of healing and transform broken lives, bringing sight to the blind, freedom to the captive, faith to the fearful —and Acts 4:31 tells us that “When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.” And we know what happened next—we know that they boldly proclaimed the good news of a coronation day—the good news that the king had been crowned—they boldly proclaimed the prophetic declaration that God had set His King on that Holy Hill called Mount Calvary, that He who was crucified and dead and buried had by the power of the Holy Spirit risen from the grave and broken the power of death and Hell and sin once and for all that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

- The early church saw Psalm 2 in a different context, and they echoed, they retold, they remembered its bold proclamation about God’s Messiah, because they had seen its message not contradicted, not superseded, but fulfilled. And the contemporary church, the church in 2021, when we read the words of Psalm 2, we can also be reminded that even though the nations and the authorities and the rulers of this world may plot and conspire against the things of God—we are called to boldly proclaim that the King of Kings and Lord of Lords is still on the throne—Let every kindred, every tribe on this terrestrial ball, to Him all majesty ascribe, and crown him Lord of all—we are called to boldly proclaim that every day is Coronation Day.