

Why Study the Psalms?
Psalms 1 & 2
I. & II. Psalms for All of Life

There are a number of answers one could give to the above question, and we plan to give in time. We could refer to their *theological* comprehensiveness – they are a “little Bible,” as Luther said; their *Christological* insights– through types and prophecies we are introduced to the life, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, and rule of Jesus Christ; their *emotional* and *experiential* wholeness, providing what Calvin called “an anatomy of all parts of the soul,”¹ expressing the full spectrum of human passions across the whole range of human circumstances; their *devotional* richness, teaching us how to speak to God in all the contexts and vicissitudes of life; finally their *historical* importance, serving as the primary prayer book and hymn book of the church since apostolic times. Or, we might say we study them because they are part of the Bible, inspired Scripture, the word of God, and consequently, authoritative and true.

However, what I propose instead is to allow the Psalms themselves to tell us why we should study them. J. Alec Motyer (1924-2016) maintains that we should read Psalms 1 and 2 as bracketed together by the theme of “blessed.” Psalm 1 begins with “Blessed is the man” (v1), and Psalm 2 ends with “Blessed are all” (v12). They are “complementary,” he argues (correctly in our view): Psalm 1 describes the blessed way of life under the *direction* of the word of God; Psalm 2 the blessed way of life under the *rule* of the Word of God, the divine Son and King. “The heart of the spiritual life,” the Psalms teach us, “lies in our devotion (Ps 2:12a) and constant resorting (2:12b) to the Lord

¹ Elsie Anne McKee, *John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Ministry* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 56; cited from Calvin’s “Preface to the Commentary on the Psalms.”

Jesus, and in our assiduous attention to the Word of God (Ps 1:2).”²

Similarly, O. Palmer Robertson (b.1937) argues that Psalms 1 and 2 “stand as twin pillars forming an entry to the literary temple of the Psalter, inviting men to come and worship the Lord.” They have different emphases, he notes, yet a common theme: the blessed life. “The first psalm begins by declaring the blessedness of the man who honours *God’s law*; the second psalm ends by declaring the blessedness of the man who honours *God’s Messiah*.”³

Blessed may be translated as “happy” so long as one understands happiness not superficially as the term is sometimes applied, but as meaning “truly happy.” Do we want to be truly happy? Who doesn’t? I dare say we all would answer the question in the affirmative. We all want to be *truly* happy. The two opening Psalms tell us where to go to find that happiness. Let’s look at what each of these psalms teach as they urge us to give ourselves to the careful study of the Psalms, and even more broadly, of the whole Scripture.

Psalm 1

Psalm 1 since ancient times, even in pre-Christian rabbinic sources, has been regarded as an introduction or gateway to the whole psalter. Basil the Great (b.c. 330; fl 357-379), one of the Cappadocian Fathers, likened Psalm 1 to the foundation of a house and the keel of a ship. It introduces, he maintained, “the

² Alec Motyer, *Psalms by the Day: A New Devotional Translation* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2016), 14.

³ O. Palmer Robertson, *Psalms in Congregational Celebration* (Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1995), 13 (emphasis added); Peter C. Cragie agrees: the reference to “blessed” in the opening verse of Psalm 1 and the closing verse of Psalm 2 “indicates that the two psalms together were considered to be a literary unit” (P. C. Cragie, *Psalms 1-50: Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 19* [Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1983], 59).

whole structure of the Psalms.”⁴ Fast forward 1000 plus years and John Calvin (1509-1564) surmises that Ezra or some other person “placed this psalm at the beginning by way of preface, in which he admonishes all believers to meditate on the law of God.”⁵ Five hundred years after Calvin, C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892), echoing Matthew Henry (1662-1714), entitled it, “*The Preface Psalm*,” seeing the rest of the Psalter as an elaboration upon its themes, contrasting the blessed way of the righteous (vv1-3), and the destructive end of the wicked (vv4-6), particularly underscoring the fruit that flows from meditation upon the word of God (v2).⁶ The late 19th and early 20th century Cambridge commentator A. F. Kirkpatrick (1849-1940) speaks of Psalm 1 as “an appropriate *prologue* to the Psalter, which records the manifold experiences of the godly.”⁷ For American Presbyterian W. S. Plummer (in his massive 1,200 page commentary), Psalm 1 is “a preface to all the great matters which come after it.” He regards it as “a compend of all the Psalms, and indeed of all Scripture.”⁸ Among modern commentators, Motyer (1924-2016) says simply, “Psalm 1 introduces the whole book of Psalms.”⁹

⁴ Cited in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament VII: Psalms 1-50*. Ed. by Craig S. Blaising, Carmen S. Hardin (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2008), 2.

⁵ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. James Anderson, Vols. 1-5 (Calvin Translation Society: Edinburgh, 1845), I:1; as reworded in *RCS, NT*, 7:8.

⁶ C.H. Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, Volumes 1-6 (1865-1885; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1950), 1:1; He considers the psalm “the text upon which the whole of the Psalms make up a divine sermon” (I:1): See Matthew Henry, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament: Vol. I-VI* (1721; Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H, Revell, n/d), III:238.

⁷ A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: at the University Press, 1902), 1 (emphasis added).

⁸ W. S. Plummer, *Studies in the Book of Psalms* (1867; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 27; his dates are 1802-1880.

⁹ Alec Motyer, “The Psalms,” in *The New Bible Commentary*, 21st Century Edition. G. J. Wenham, D. A. Carson, R. T. France, eds.(1953; Downers

What does this psalm teach us? It teaches us where the blessed life, the good life, the happy life is to be found. It directs us both negatively and positively.

Negatively

¹Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers. (Ps 1:1)

Right away we see that this good life is lived in the context of opposition. We face “the wicked,” “sinners,” and “scoffers.” This has always been the case for God’s people, perhaps more today than ever. Once a man’s home was his castle. He could close the door on all outside influences. Now the ungodly invade his home through screens on phones, televisions, and computers. Damaging images and messages bombard and seduce us constantly.

So while this life is blessed of God, it is not an easy life. It is a life lived exposed to the “counsel,” the thinking, the outlook, the priorities of the “wicked.” We daily are exposed to the enticements of the “way of sinners,” the glittering and glamorous lifestyles of those who know no financial or moral boundaries, who have access to limitless and consequence-free pleasure and luxury. We constantly hear from the “seat” of “scoffers” who are comfortably settled in their skepticism, who smugly scoff at the Bible’s claims, who ridicule the things of

Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994); Kidner: “It seems likely that this psalm was specially composed as an introduction to the whole Psalter” (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary on Books I & II of the Psalms* [Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1973], 47); According to Peter C. Craigie, Psalm 1 is a “didactic poem” whose “primary setting is literary” meaning “it forms an introduction to the Psalter as a whole and has been placed in its present position by the editor or compiler of the Psalter for that purpose” (*Psalms 1-50*, 59).

God, and mock the people of God, reminding us of all the pleasure that we miss out on and the foolishness of the myths and fairytales (as they see it) that we believe. These scoffing sinners by-and-large, are the winners in the game of life. They are the witty, clever, likeable, winsome and successful worldlings who surround us. They are the “cool kids,” the wise, mighty, and noble (1 Cor 1:26), the social elite, the in-group to which all others wish to belong. For them, the things of God are “folly” (1 Cor 2:14).

Note the progression, from walking within earshot of the wicked, overhearing what they are saying; to standing and listening, falling under their influence, considering their perspective; finally to sitting, now in a settled outlook and disposition. The danger is that we will be drawn into evil one step, perhaps one small step, one subtle act at a time, until one has become one of them. This is how evil progresses: often through the agency of so-called “friends,” we move from initial contact to use, to abuse, to addict; from initial questions to doubts, to unbelief, to persecutor of the faithful.

The Puritan Richard Baxter (1615-1691), in his Christian classic *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, clarifies that *necessary* companionship with the ungodly is not forbidden. We are not prohibited from showing kindness to the wicked. Rather, “It is the *unnecessary* society of ungodly men, and too much familiarity with unprofitable companions” that must be avoided. He warns not only of those who are openly profane, but also of “dead-hearted formalists,” and those who are “civil and moral,” yet “whose conversation is empty, unsavory, and barren.”¹⁰ “A godly man, that he may avoid evil, utterly renounces the companionship of evildoers,” Henry insists.¹¹ He refuses to listen to their counsel, to follow their ways, or adopt their

¹⁰ Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, XII.3 (1650; Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1998), 522.

¹¹ Henry, *Exposition*, III:239.

cynicism. Again Henry counsels, “That he may not imitate them, he will not associate with them.”¹² “Go out from their midst and be separate” (2 Cor 6:17). Choose friends wisely!

Positively

What is the antidote?

²but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. (Ps 1:2)

The blessed man avoids evil and evildoers, and instead “meditates,” he ponders, considers, contemplates, elaborates upon, thinks through the meaning, drawing out its implications, the applications of “law,” the *torah*, broadly speaking the “teaching” of the Bible.¹³ He has not a passing acquaintance of Scripture. Rather, the law of God is “his delight.”¹⁴ He doesn’t endure the Bible. He loves God’s word (Ps 119:97). He finds it sweeter to the taste than honey and more valuable than gold (Ps 19:10). Upon it he “meditates *day and night*.” He is thinking about God’s word all the time.

The whole world presents a tough environment for the blessed man. Yet because of the grace that God imparts through His word, he is strong. He is like a tree:

³He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. (Ps 1:3)

¹² Henry, *Exposition*, III:239.

¹³ The ESV renders *torah* in the book of Proverbs as “teaching” (Prov 1:8; 4:2; 6:20; 7:2) paralleled by “instruction” (*musār*), “commandments” (*miswāh*), “precepts” (*leqah*).

¹⁴ Henry: “We may judge of our spiritual state by asking, ‘What is the law of God to us?’” (*Exposition*, III:239).

A tree represents a man of towering stature. The man of God through the word of God is a man of strong convictions. He is unflinching in the face of the world's enticements, unwavering in the windstorms of the world's opposition. He is not swayed by its arguments, seductions, or enticements. He is "planted," his roots are deeply sunk in divine truth, producing stability and constancy. He enjoys through God's word "streams of water," a constant flow of grace that refreshes his soul.¹⁵ He thrives by the pure milk of God's word (1 Pt 2:1-2). He is being sanctified by the truth of God's word (Jn 17:17). His life is fruitful. He "yields... fruit in its season." His life has timely impact on others for good. He has a godly impact upon his children, his neighbors, his fellow believers, and the people with whom he works. His speech is wise, seasoned with salt according to the needs of the moment, tailored to the need of those to whom he speaks (Col 4:5-6). His words are wholesome, edifying, grace giving (Eph 4:28). His "leaf does not wither," that is, his convictions and commitments don't diminish over time. He doesn't grow soft with age.

On July 14, 2025 pastor John MacArthur died. For 56 years he pastored the Grace Community Church in the San Fernando Valley area of Los Angeles. I first attended his congregation in late 1973 and early 1974 when he was just four years into his ministry. My friends and I continued to do so for the next three years. I have listened to literally hundreds if not thousands of his sermons. For 56 years he bore consistent, faithful fruit through his preaching and teaching of God's word. Despite opposition, and at times nationwide controversy, he didn't wither. He bore fruit all the way to the end, still in his pulpit at the age of 86.

¹⁵ Water is both an Old Testament and New Testament metaphor for divine grace (eg. Ps 46:4; Isa 44:3, 49:10; 55; Jn 4:7-15, 7:38.

The blessed man finishes strong. His spiritual life remains healthy and fruitful. Consequently, the blessed man's happiness "is not short and transitory, as all, worldly felicity is," says Matthew Poole (1624-1679). Rather, his happiness is "fixed and everlasting."¹⁶

"In *all* that he does, he prospers." Finally, *all* is well for those in a right relationship with God. This "all" refers primarily to "soul-prosperity," says Henry.¹⁷ It refers to prosperity "possibly in this life," Poole concedes, "but assuredly in the next."¹⁸ Or as another Puritan John Trapp (1601-1669) puts it, the prosperity referred to is "that of the soul," yet "temporal also, so far as may make for his eternal good."¹⁹ He prospers because meditation on the Psalms specifically and Scripture more generally, makes him wise about what is important and what is unimportant, what is a priority and what isn't. He understands the supremacy of eternity over time and God over man. The word of God has made him wise about work, finances, relationships, marriage, children, and church rather than ignorant and foolish. Because of the molding power of Scripture, he is kind, and just, and fair in his dealings with others rather than unkind and cheating them. He is diligent in his work rather than slothful, lazy, and negligent. He is humble, understanding his gifts and graces are from God and not of his own virtue and credit. This is the blessed, the happy man. As Henry says, "These only are happy, truly happy, that are holy, truly holy."²⁰

Comparatively

All of this contrasts with the wicked:

¹⁶ Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vols. 1-3 (1683-85, 1865; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1963), 3:2.

¹⁷ Henry, *Exposition*, III:240.

¹⁸ Poole, *Commentary*, III:2.

¹⁹ Trapp, *Commentary*, 2:428.

²⁰ Henry, *Exposition*, III:240.

⁴ The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. ⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. (Ps 1:4, 5)

They are “not so.” Why? Because they have settled into the echo chamber of the ungodly. They partake of “the wisdom of the wise,” the “wisdom of the world,” “the wisdom of this age” which God has exposed as foolish (1 Cor 1:19-20; 2:6). They’ve embraced all the right opinions. All right thinking people think as they do. Far from delighting in the law of God, they hate and mock it.²¹ They are not strong, stable, fruitful, or enduring. The evildoers are like “chaff,” light, empty, inconsequential. So many of the people that the world admires and honors, who embody worldly wisdom, prove to be painfully superficial. There is nothing to them beyond that which is skin deep— literally. They are rewarded by the world because they enjoy physical beauty, or athletic prowess, or verbal acuity, characteristics that “wither” like the leaf and fade over time. Their prosperity is temporary. Age overtakes them. Once their beauty or brawn or bluster wanes, nothing substantial is left; nothing to admire, nothing worthy, nothing enduring. The wind of judgment “drives” them “away” like empty husks, weightless, lifeless, rootless, fruitless. They are driven to and fro by every wind of cultural change and every moral revision. As the winds of public opinion blow, they are blown along as well. They have no real convictions. They simply embrace whatever might be popular at the moment. Why? Because they are like chaff: weightless, lifeless, rootless, fruitless. They think of themselves as important and admired. They may be “stars” in our culture. Their followers may be called “fans.” Perhaps they are respected and feared. However, they “will not stand in the judgment.” No, they will crumple like a piece of trash to be

²¹ Henry: “We may judge of our spiritual state by asking, ‘What is the law of God to us?’” (*Exposition*, III:239).

thrown into a fire. They will be crushed by the weight of God's wrath. "That great day," says Henry, "will be a day of discovery, a day of distinction, and a day of final division."²² The actors, the models, the athletes, the politicians, the tycoons, the billionaires, the celebrities, and all whom they influence, all who take their cues from them regarding cultural and social fashion will be exposed as evil. They will "perish."

Only "the righteous" will stand in the "congregation (*ēdah*) of the righteous," the gathering of the righteous on that great last day. They will be excluded, shut out forever. Yet the righteous will be vindicated by God.

For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. (Ps 1:6)

In the end there are only two ways: the way of the wicked and the way of the righteous. There is no middle ground. The Psalms are urging us to make the right choice. God loves and blesses the righteous.

In the end, there are only two ways: the way of the wicked and the way of the righteous. In the strongest of terms, Psalm 1 invites us into the study of the Psalter. How will we be able to stand where others will not? "Omissions," Henry warns, "make way for commissions."²³ We will stand over against the taunts of the wicked only through devotion to the word of God. "By the word of your lips I have avoided the ways of the violent" (Ps 17:4).

Psalm 2

Henry, as we've seen of other commentators, connects Psalm 2 with its predecessor saying, "As the foregoing Psalm was

²² Henry, *Exposition*, III:241.

²³ Henry, *Exposition*, III:239.

moral, and showed us our duty, and so this is evangelical, and shows us our Savior.”²⁴ Old Princeton’s J. A. Alexander (1809-1860) argues that the first Psalm “is in fact an introduction to the second, and the second to what follows.”²⁵ Psalm 2 anticipates One who is “Anointed” (v2), who is God’s “Son” (vv7, 12), who will inherit the nations and rule them with a “rod of iron” (vv8, 9). It predicts the opposition that this Anointed One will face (vv1-3), the defeat of His enemies (vv4, 5), His reign (vv6-9), and His call to all peoples and nations to submit to His rule and offer Him worship (vv10-12). Spurgeon entitles this “The Psalm of Messiah the Prince.”²⁶ As we must submit to the *direction* of the word of God, so we must submit to the *rule* of the Son of God. “These two blessings must go together,” Robertson reminds us.²⁷ We only may delight in God’s law and not dread its condemnation when we are trusting in the Messiah.

Conflict

As was the case with Psalm 1, Psalm 2 envisions the world as a tough place for God’s people. If Psalm 1 features the conflict between the righteous and the wicked on a personal level, Psalm 2 does the same on a global scale. Psalm 1 provides the micro view, Psalm 2 the macro.

¹ Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?

² The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed. (Ps 2:1, 2; cf Acts 4:25-26)

²⁴ Henry, *Exposition*, III:241; Henry goes on to say of Psalm 2, “As the former (i.e. Psalm 1) is very fitly prefixed to this book of devotions, because as it is necessary to our acceptance with God that we should be subject to his law, so it is likewise that we should be subject to the grace of his gospel, and come to him in the name of a Mediator” (*Exposition*, III:242).

²⁵ J. A. Alexander, *The Psalms Translated and Explained* (1850;1873; Herts, England: Evangelistic Press, 1975), 12.

²⁶ Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, I:10.

²⁷ Robertson, *Psalms in Congregational Celebration*, 28.

The nations are raging, the peoples of the world are plotting. The kings and rulers of the earth in particular are scheming together in deliberate, calculated rebellion against God. Yet opposition to God arises not only among the great ones of the earth, but also among the people; not only the mighty but the mob. They *all* oppose the LORD (the divine name, *YHWH*) and His “Anointed” (*māsiyah*), the Messiah, translated in the Septuagint (LXX) by the Greek word *christos*, Christ. This is how it always has been and ever will be. “The word of the cross is *folly* to the perishing” (1 Cor 1:18, 23). The worldly wise consider the gospel message to be foolishness, unworthy of their consideration. The apostle Paul concedes that there are “not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble” (1 Cor 1:26, NASB). The great ones of the earth have rarely embraced the gospel. “None of the *rulers* of this age” has understood the wisdom of God in the gospel (1 Cor 2:8). They regard gospel truth (“the things of the Spirit of God”) as foolishness as does the “natural man” everywhere, whatever his or her social status (1 Cor 2:14). The kings and queens, presidents and premieres, the CEOs and chairmen of the corporate boards, the trustees of the great foundations, the Hollywood and media giants, the intellectuals in the universities, the tech leaders of Silicon Valley all by-in-large are not friends of serious Christianity. They are contemptuous of it. Don’t expect it to be otherwise.

This is a curious thing. Why would they oppose God? What is their complaint? It is God’s law, His authority, and the constraints that He places upon them. This is at the heart of humanity’s rebellion against God. What the righteous delight in and meditate upon the wicked view as bondage. What God gives as principles for living the good life, they see as oppressive intrusions upon their freedoms.

³“*Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.*” (Ps 2:3)

“The age in which we live, however bland and accommodating it may at times appear, essentially hates, opposes, and rebels against God in Christ,” says Motyer.²⁸ The world views God’s omnipotence as threatening, His omniscience as unnerving, His omnipresence as unwelcome. They want to be left alone to pursue their lusts. “They are impatient of God’s authority, envious at Christ’s advancement, and have a rooted enmity to the Spirit of holiness,” says Henry.²⁹ God’s laws, His rules, His requirements are viewed not as life-sustaining and life-guiding principles but as “bonds” and “cords.” His power to enforce His will is bitterly resented. God’s laws, as they see it, are chains and shackles. They restrict. They suppress. They place unacceptable limits upon what worldlings want to do. They want a world unfettered by divine laws and uncomplicated by a divine Lawgiver. They want to do what they want to do without the constraints of God’s rulebook, God’s created design, and God’s moral purposes. God’s do’s and don’ts, as they see it, mean “my worst life now.” God’s restraints mean a world of gray, a world bland and boring. They mean no fun, no partying, no excitement. Like Eve, they believe that God is holding them back. He is preventing them from realizing their true identity and full potential (Gen 3:1-5). “It is Satan’s delusion,” says Motyer, “to represent divine conditions of blessing as hostile restrictions holding mankind back from proper freedom.”³⁰

The outcome

These are the world’s perceptions. What is the reality? They bump into reality.

⁴He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. ⁵Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury. (Psalm 2:4-5)

²⁸ Motyer, “Psalms,” 489.

²⁹ Henry, *Exposition*, III:242.

³⁰ Motyer, “Psalms,” 48.

God laughs at them.³¹ He “holds them in derision.” The scorn of the wicked in Psalm 1 is reversed in Psalm 2. God regards the great ones of the earth with disdain for their presumption, their arrogance, their contemptible, foolish, and futile attempts at rebellion. A battle against omnipotence is absurd, as is their perception of reality. Jesus promises that the truth liberates. “And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:32). Moral truth, religious truth, spiritual truth correspond with reality. The opposite is what leads to bondage. Sin has an addictive and enslaving property. It is pleasurable and progressive. It is narcotic-like: more and more is needed to get the same results. Jesus warns, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a *slave* to sin” (Jn 8:34). His double “truly” is a double warning. Sin comes to control and direct one’s life. “For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is *enslaved*” (2 Pt 2:19b). Only by the redemption of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit do believers come to be “no longer *enslaved to sin*” (Rom 6:6). Allegiance to the trinity of evil, the world (Gal 4:3), the devil (Gal 4:8), and the flesh means slavery, not freedom, not self-realization, not self-actualization, not being my own person or my true self. It means bondage.

The world’s war against God provokes Him to “speak to them in His “wrath” and terrifying “fury.”³² God roars, brushes aside the worldlings, and carries on with His plan.³³

³¹ “Beneath this bold anthropomorphism there is hidden a profound truth, namely, that to all superior beings, and above all, to God himself, there is something in sin not only odious but absurd, something which cannot possibly escape the contempt of higher, much less the highest, intelligence” (Alexander, *Psalms*, 15).

³² Henry: “As a word made us, so a word can unmake us again” (*Exposition*, III:243).

³³ Henry: “The moon walks in brightness, though the dogs bark at it” *Exposition*, III:243; “To submit to Christ,” says Henry, is to “give up yourselves to be governed by his laws, disposed of by his providence, and entirely devoted to his interest” (*Exposition*, III:246).

The verdict

Verses 6 to 9 build to the “Therefore” of verses 10 to 12, the concluding call to submit to the Son of God if one is to be blessed. Verse 6 is where Psalm 2 begins to tie together the blessing promised in Psalm 1 with the blessing promised in Psalm 2. Who are the blessed ones of Ps 1:1-2 and Ps 2:12? They are those, we repeat, who are directed by the *law* of God and submit to the *rule* of the Son of God. They recognize the King whom God has enthroned on Mt. Zion.³⁴

⁶“As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.”
(Ps 2:6)

Who is this King? He surely must be the “Anointed” One, the “Christ” of v2. Further, He is God’s Son:

⁷I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. (Ps 2:7)

What is the extent of His rule? The nations:

⁸Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. ⁹You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.” (Ps 2:8-9)

Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the King-Son of Psalm 2. What is hidden in the Old is revealed in the New. The New Testament spells out His identity for us. Kingship is an important theme in the four gospels, particularly Matthew. He introduces Jesus as “the son of David,” that is, heir to David’s throne (Mt 1:1). He tells us of the wise men seeking Him “who has been born *king* of the Jews” (Mt 2:2). His message, of course, is “repent, for the

³⁴ Henry: Zion is “a type of the gospel church” (*Exposition*, III:244); It is the people of God considered in its idealized form.

kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt 4:17; Mk 1:14). We hear the echo of “You are my Son” at Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness (Mt 4:3, 6; Lk 4:3, 9), baptism (v7; cf. Mt 3:17), and at the transfiguration (Mt 17:5; 2 Pet 1:17).³⁵ Psalm 2 is cited as predictive of the crucifixion, the raging of the nations finding its ultimate expression in Jesus’ execution (vv1-2; cf. Acts 4:25-28); of the resurrection (vs7; cf. Acts 13:33); and of the reign of Christ (v9; cf. Rev 2:27; 12:5; 19:15). Though initially applied to David, Solomon, and their successors, a “greater . . . than David or Solomon,” says Kidner, “was needed to justify the full fury of these threats and the glory of these promises.”³⁶ He will rule the nations with a “rod of iron.” He will “break” and “dash . . . in pieces” those who refuse to submit. “Those that will not bow shall break.”³⁷

How then are we to enter into the place of God’s blessing? By submission to His Christ-King-Son. “The accredited gramatico-historical method of interpretation of the Psalms leads readers who are not hard-hearted to the gospel of Jesus Christ,” argues Old Testament scholar Bruce K. Waltke (b.1930).³⁸ The Psalms in their entirety lead us to Christ. David is their primary author. Seventy-three or nearly half of the entire Psalter comes to us by his hand.³⁹ He is called “the sweet Psalmist of Israel” (2 Sam 23:1). His experiences as expressed in the Psalms foreshadow

³⁵ See also Mt 8:29, 14:33, 26:63, 27:40, 43; Mt 3:11, 15:39; Lk 1:35, 4:41, 22:70; Jn 1:34, 49, 3:18, 5:25, 10:36, 11:4, 19:7, 20:31; Acts 9:20; Rom 1:4; 2 Cor 11:9; Gal 2:20, etc.

³⁶ Kidner, *Psalms*, I:50.

³⁷ Henry, *Exposition*, III:245.

³⁸ Bruce K. Waltke, “Christ in the Psalms,” in Robert L. Penny, *The Hope Fulfilled: Essays in Honor of O. Palmer Robertson* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 26.

³⁹ Other authors: One psalm is attributed to Moses (Ps 90), 12 to Asaph (Pss 50, 73-83), 11 to the sons of Korah (Pss 45-49, 84-85, 87-88). Two are attributed to Solomon (72 and 127), one to Hemon (88, also attributed to the sons of Korah), one to Ethan (89), and three to Jeduthun (jointly with either David or Asaph). Many are without attribution.

the life of the consummatory anointed Son and King. What is explicit in Psalm 2 is implicit in the rest of the Psalter because David is a type of Christ. His life as anointed King anticipates the life of his greater Son.

¹⁰*Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. (Ps 2:10)*

Be *wise* and be *warned*, O great ones of the earth. Arguing from the greater to the lesser, let *all* be wise and warned. Submit to God's Son, God's King, the anointed One, Jesus Christ.

¹¹*Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. (Ps 2:11)*

Serving the LORD (Jehovah) with fear and serving the Son come to mean the same thing. Service is to be rendered with the perfect balance of fear and rejoicing. Our joy is always a reverential joy and our fear a joyful fear. "Joyfulness tempered with reverent awe befits those who approach One so gracious yet so terrible," says Kirkpatrick.⁴⁰

¹²*Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (Ps 2:12)*

The "kiss" is a sign of homage, obedience, and submission. Do so, "lest he be angry." Fail to kiss the Son," says Henry, and "it will be a great provocation to him."⁴¹ Would you be blessed? Honor the Son. Let yourself be *directed* by the *word* of God and *ruled* by the *Son* of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. "Those that will be saved by him," says Henry, "must be ruled by him."⁴²

⁴⁰ Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, 11; Motyer adds: "There is a distinction between confidence and presumptuousness" ("Psalms," 490).

⁴¹ Henry, *Exposition*, III:246.

⁴² Henry, *Exposition*, III:242.

This then is the message of the Psalms. In all the circumstances of life the Psalms direct us to the blessed life found in the Blessed One through His blessed word. Do we want to be happy? The good life, the life worthy to be lived, is enjoyed only by those directed by the Word of God, and ruled by the Kingly Son of God, the Christ of God. Why study them? Because as Augustine believed, “The voice of Christ and His church is well-nigh the only voice to be heard in the Psalms.”⁴³ Showing the profound insight that we regularly expect from Luther, he says the Book of Psalms “should be precious and dear to us if only because it most clearly promises the death and resurrection of Christ, and describes His kingdom, and the nature and standing of all Christian people.”⁴⁴ Likewise, Henry considered the Psalms “one of the choicest and most excellent parts of all the Old Testament,” having “so much... in it of Christ and his gospel, as well as of God and his law,” that it is rightly called “the *abstract*, or *summary*, of *both Testaments*.”⁴⁵ The point of the Psalms and all of the Bible simply is this: life as it is meant to be lived is found only in Christ and His law-word.

⁴³ Cited in Andrew A. Bonar, *Christ and His Church in the Book of Psalms* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1860), ix.

⁴⁴ Martin Luther, “Preface to the Psalms,” 1528, in *Martin Luther: Selections from his writings edited and with an introduction by John Dillenberger*, ed. (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1961), 38.

⁴⁵ Henry, *Exposition*, III:236.