

Earth Is A Mess! What's Gonna Happen To Us?

1. Warm-up Question: What is one of your all-time favorite popular songs – a song that really moves you? Why do you find that song so moving?
2. We're in the midst of a sermon series on the book of Psalms, which is a compilation of the favorite songs of our ancestors in the faith. Psalm 1, as we saw last week, addresses one of our greatest personal concerns – how can I thrive in life? This week we turned our attention to Psalm 2, which addresses one of our greatest collective concerns – what's ultimately going to happen to life on planet earth? Read Psalm 2:1-11, as printed on p. 3.
3. **The Bad News.** The first few verses of Psalm 2 deliver the bad news, namely, that we humans, collectively, are a rebellious lot. God created this garden-like earth and put us here to lovingly tend it in partnership with God. Yet from the beginning, we humans have, by in large, repeatedly said, “Buzz off, God! You are not the boss of us!” The Lord and the Lord's Messiah – God the Father and God the Son – have repeatedly said, “Let's do something beautiful together,” and we humans collectively have repeatedly said, “Let us burst their bonds asunder and cast their cords from us!”
 - a. Why are we humans so rebellious? Clearly there are exceptions, but the vast majority of humanity has little interest in God or God's values. Why is that?
 - b. Jeff shared a story told in the *New York Times* 30 years ago about a hateful reaction of so-called “Christians” in Mississippi when two Lesbians bought a farm and established a camp for women. For Jeff, the story captured the depth of our human brokenness. Tell us about something you've witnessed (personally or in the media) that, for you, captures the depth of human brokenness.
 - c. There are a variety of terrible problems and trends we hear about in the news that are dragging humanity downward. What's the trend that most troubles you?
4. **The Good News.** The good news in Psalm 2 is that evil will not ultimately triumph. Human attempts to defeat God are laughable. According to Psalm 2, despite the resistance of earthly powers, God will “set a king on Zion,” i.e., the Messiah. God will say to the Messiah, “You are my son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.” At first blush, the language of this passage sounds violent – “break them with a rod of iron” and “dash them in pieces.” But Jeff reminded us that, in the book of Revelation, the “sword” Jesus uses is held in his mouth, not his hand. The Bible says God's word is like a sharp two-edged sword. In other words, the weapon Jesus uses isn't a hand-held sword, but rather the power of the truth he speaks. Ultimately that truth will shatter the power of evil. What do you think of this interpretation? Do you think Jesus would ever use blunt physical force? If so, under what circumstances?

5. Although Psalm 2 promises that the love and goodness of God will ultimately triumph through Jesus the Messiah, it doesn't tell us how we will get there from where we are now. However, many other prophetic passages in the Bible do. Unfortunately, there's no consensus on what those passages mean. Broadly speaking, the competing interpretations can be divided into two categories: (a) Pessimistic Interpretations that say things will keep getting worse and worse on earth until we finally descend into a time of such Great Tribulation that Jesus will have to directly intervene to save the planet from itself; and (b) Optimistic Interpretations that say eventually things will gradually get better and better until the goodness and love of Christ prevails on earth, preparing the way for the reign of Jesus. Revered theologians have been on competing sides of these two interpretations. Which of these two interpretive approaches most resonates with you – and why? Does it bother you that esteemed theologians have disagreed on this? Why or why not?

6. When talking about end-times prophecies, Jesus said, "About that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." Matthew 24:36. In other words, Jesus said we're never going to be able to confidently know in advance when or how it will all end. That, in turn, raises the question of why God bothered to give us prophecies that are so ambiguous we're not able to figure them out. Jeff suggested two possible reasons.
 - a. First, maybe the purpose of the prophecies is not so we can figure out all details, but simply remind and encourage us that a better day is coming when love ultimately wins. Is it important to you personally to embrace that kind of hopeful perspective? How might that perspective affect the feel of our everyday lives?
 - b. Second, maybe God deliberately made the prophecies ambiguous enough to accommodate either a positive or negative path because how we get to the end is ultimately up to us. In this view, whether things are going to get better and better or worse and worse depends on the collective choices we humans collectively make – kind of like a movie where you get to choose either a happy or tragic ending. Does this either/or approach to end-time prophecies resonate with you? Why or why not?

7. If the path we take to the end of the age is up to us, that means the choices we make really matter. If enough of us do our part, the goodness of Christ will spread and earth will become more and more like heaven until we're ready for Jesus to reign directly over us. If enough of us don't, then the road to the end of the age is going to be perilous. Jeff offered a couple examples of how we can do our part, collectively as a church, and in our personal lives.
 - a. What is your dream for how our church can play a meaningful role in moving the world closer to the day when the goodness and values of Jesus prevail?
 - b. What is something you can do (or are already doing) in your personal life that can help move the world incrementally closer to the day when Jesus reigns?

May God help us to live our lives with a passionate, missional awareness!

Psalm 2

- ¹ Why do the nations conspire,
and the peoples plot in vain?
- ² The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the LORD and the Lord's anointed, saying,
- ³ "Let us burst their bonds asunder,
and cast their cords from us."
- ⁴ The One who sits in the heavens laughs;
the LORD has them in derision.
- ⁵ Then God will speak to them in wrath,
and terrify them in fury, saying,
- ⁶ "I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill."
- ⁷ I will tell of the decree of the LORD:
The Lord said to me, "You are my son;
today I have begotten you.
- ⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.
- ⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron,
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."
- ¹⁰ Now therefore, O kings, be wise;
be warned, O rulers of the earth.
- ¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear,
with trembling.