



On Tuesday, *Transparency International* released its Global Corruption Barometer 2013, a worldwide survey that analyzes corruption in 107 countries. Here are five of the world's most corrupt institutions:

1) **The Police.** In many countries if you have a problem with the law, avoid the police because you might end up with more problems. In Mexico alone, drug cartels pay local police an estimated \$100 million every month!

2) **Judges.** There are 20 countries that think the judiciary is the most corrupt institution. The rule of law disappears when you cannot trust the justice system.

3) **Public Officials and Civil Servants.** Government employees in charge of land, registry, health, and education have a privileged position controlling access to certain grants or assistance. That means they can easily ask for bribes. This sort of corruption has mostly affected countries like Afghanistan, Cambodia, Iraq, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Venezuela, Mexico, and Colombia.

4) **Political Parties.** Citizens of Argentina, Greece, Colombia, the United States, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Israel, Uruguay, and Jamaica share one belief: They think political parties are their country's most corrupt institutions.

5) **Citizens.** One of the largest problems when dealing with public corruption is the people themselves.

Transparency International reports, "When there is widespread belief that corruption prevails and that the powerful in particular are able to get away with it, people lose faith in those entrusted with power."

I think the problem goes much deeper than that. When the powerful get away with great evil, many of us lose faith in God. We are left wondering, is God really all powerful? Why do evil people seem to prosper? Why doesn't God seem to do anything about injustice, poverty, human trafficking, war, famine, and corruption? According to this study, the world is getting worse, not better. World events often leave me feeling powerless and apathetic. What can I really do in light of these problems? Psalm 2 gives us a theological perspective for interpreting world events. Instead of apathy and fear, we are reminded of a great hope to come. The writer of Psalm 2 sees the world in a state of absolute rebellion against God.

The Nations are Plotting Against the Lord

Why do the nations conspire
and the peoples plot in vain?

The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the Lord and against his anointed, saying,
"Let us break their chains
and throw off their shackles" (verses 1–3)

Psalm 1 and 2 are considered an introduction to the entire collection of Psalms. Psalm 2 is the most quoted Psalm by writers of the New Testament. That means it has something very important to say. In Psalm 1, we saw two paths—the way of the godly and the way of the world. It was more focused on the individual. The way of the world continues in Psalm 2 and now extends beyond an individual to a cosmic revolt of the nations against God and his anointed. It begins with a question: "*Why do the nations conspire and the people's plot in vain?*" The writer doesn't seem worried or surprised by the rebellion of the nations. He knows life is complicated and the world is a dangerous place. As we enter the world of Psalm 2, we see suffering, injustice and hatred for God. It's the world at its worst. It's a world in rebellion against God and anyone who belongs to Jesus Christ will get his enemies in the bargain.

The nations conspire, rage and plot in vain against God. The word *plot* is the same word for *meditate*. Just as the godly meditate on his law in Psalm 1, the enemies of God meditate on how to overthrow God and his ways. While we pray for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven, they pray for God's kingdom to fail. The kings rise up not only against the Lord but also his anointed. They band together and give each other advice on how to best influence the world with their ways. It's helpful to remember Israel was surrounded by pagan world powers that boasted impressive temples, gods, armies and libraries. The Babylonians, Assyrians, and Egyptians were destructive and oppressive forces ruling while this Psalm was written. In the ancient world these kings even considered themselves to be divine leaders. They were gods. How does a follower of God respond to these rulers?

As we step back and look at the people in this Psalm, they all seem very impressive. They are the nations, the rulers, the kings

and the powerful. These people not only reject God but they turn that rejection into a world power. They run the armies of the world, direct the advances of science, run school systems, lead governments, and rule in the marketplaces. If this is all true, then what difference can we Christians make? What chance does a little “tree” meditating in Psalm 1 have with the movers and shakers of this world? That’s the tension being built in Psalm 2.

If God is good and loving then why do nations rebel? It’s the same with the human heart; they don’t want to be ruled by Him. The nations don’t want to be subject to God. They want to live their own way. God’s law and his ways are like chains and shackles pinning down their freedom to do what they want. The freedom that comes from living for God and walking in obedience is slavery to them. The cover of *Time* magazine this month read, “The me, me, me generation.” That’s what sin is at its core; it’s denying God’s rule in favor of self rule. Every one of us has a heart whose natural tendency is to rebel against God. It’s been that way since the very beginning in the Garden of Eden when man made a deliberate decision to choose the way of the world and not the way of God.

The problem is not only within us; there is something at work behind the scenes. The picture being described here is an unseen spiritual battle. Ephesians 6:12 describes it this way, *“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”* The world is hostile to Jesus and his people. We are in a struggle against the Devil, the rulers, authorities, powers and spiritual forces of evil. Jesus’ enemies are now our enemies. And the world described in the Bible are the unseen powers behind the thrones of institutions like law, politics, business, and industries that are opposed to God’s rule and God’s way. They work together to get rid of God.

We see this in our world today. In the wake of the 2011 London riots, which included days of uncontrollable looting and violence, Great Britain’s chief rabbi Jonathan Sacks decried the “moral disintegration” of the western world in a *Wall Street Journal* article:

“[The rioters] are the victims of the tsunami of wishful thinking that washed across the West saying that you can have sex without the responsibility of marriage, children without the responsibility of parenthood, social order without the responsibility of citizenship, liberty without the responsibility of morality, and self-esteem without the responsibility of work and earned achievement.

“What has happened morally in the West is what has happened financially as well. Good and otherwise sensible people were persuaded that you could spend more than you earn, incur debt at unprecedented levels and

consume the world’s resources without thinking about who will pay the bill.

“There are large parts of Britain, Europe, and even the United States where religion is a thing of the past, and there is no counter-voice to the culture of buy it, spend it, wear it, flaunt it, because you’re worth it. The message is that morality is passé, conscience is for wimps, and the single overriding command is ‘Thou shalt not be found out.’”

That’s exactly the kind of world the writer of Psalm 2 is describing. What’s God’s response? It’s quite surprising.

Jesus is the True King!

**The One enthroned in heaven laughs;
the Lord scoffs at them.
He rebukes them in his anger
and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,
“I have installed my king
on Zion, my holy mountain.”
I will proclaim the Lord’s decree:
He said to me, “You are my son;
today I have become your father.
Ask me,
and I will make the nations your inheritance,
the ends of the earth your possession.
You will break them with a rod of iron;
you will dash them to pieces like pottery
(verses 4–9)**

God Laughs

What is God’s reaction from heaven to the prideful arrogance of the nations of the earth? He is not afraid. He is not worried. He doesn’t even get up from his throne. Instead, he laughs. The first thing we hear from God in the book of Psalms is laughter. This is the only place in the entire Bible where God is said to laugh. But, it’s not joyful laughter. It’s a laugh of mockery. It expresses ridicule at the nations because God knows their end. He confidently laughs at these supposed great threats to his kingdom. As a dad with three young children, I get to wrestle with them a lot. When my son Levi was much younger he would occasionally get really mad at me and hit me in anger because of our intense wrestling battles. I would try so hard not to laugh and hurt his feelings even more! Now he can really hurt me! But that’s kind of the image here; an angry little child hitting his dad thinking he is causing him great pain.

Why does God laugh? It seems a little egocentric and unkind. There’s something about laughter that restores perspective. Ever fight with your spouse and the argument is so ridiculous you end up laughing and making up? Sometimes we take the world’s arrogance too seriously. We read about world events and

with anxiety wonder what our world is coming to. The world has always been a fearful place. This is nothing new to God. Not only does God laugh, I think he wants us to join him and laugh too. Does that sound weird to you? In laughter we remember God is still God! He is still the mighty king even when the world seems to be overtaking His kingdom. God laughs because he has already installed the rightful king. After God laughs, his Son speaks.

The Son Speaks

When God wanted to show the world how his rule was greater than any other nation, he chose men from local families and anointed them with oil. They were the kings and judges of Israel and Judah. The “Anointed One” refers to any anointed king who was seated on the throne of David. In light of the New Testament we see this pointed to Jesus.

Before long, God himself invaded human history in the person of Jesus Christ. God came in the flesh. The Messiah, a term meaning the Anointed One, did not come ruling with an iron fist. He came humbly and meek, riding on a donkey. He came proclaiming peace, not war. Jesus offered a new way.

Psalm 2 is not only about Jesus, but he himself speaks in verses 7–9. These words were used to coronate King David and all the other kings that would ascend on the throne of Israel. God has placed his king on the throne in Zion, in Jerusalem. It’s God’s king in his world that will rule. Even though the world often seems to be winning the battle, the Bible describes exactly what will happen when the true king, Jesus Christ returns to the earth again, *“at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Philippians 2:10–11).

Jesus, the Messiah, will one day rule all the nations with an iron scepter (Rev. 12:5). He is born in the line of David, he has the right to David’s throne, he is the Son of God in a unique way and will ultimately subdue all enemies under his feet. Since God is the Ruler of the world, his kingdom extends to “the ends of the earth.” The nations are the Father’s to give to his son and to his church. Using the same language of this Psalm, the risen Christ promises that the church will share in his rule, *“To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—that one ‘will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery’—just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give that one the morning star”* (Revelation 2:26–28). The Messiah will bring stability and peace to the nations even though he has to use force. Like clay pots, he will smash all opposition to his rule.

What does all this mean for us? We too have a part to play in God’s kingdom. There is an obligation here to tell others about Jesus Christ, the king. The Bible urges every one of us to make

disciples of all nations, tribes and tongues. Verse 6 speaks of God in the past tense; he has established his King on Zion. But, verses 8–9 speak in a future tense, *“I will make the nations...You will rule...you will dash...”* That day is coming and until that day, our assignment is to carry the message that Jesus reigns to all the nations. We are all missionaries. Even though many people today resist his rule, we are to lovingly remind them Jesus is the rightful king. The first and most important place he wants to rule is your heart. Who’s in charge of your life? You or mighty king Jesus?

In the final section of this Psalm, the author speaks again, but this time he uses a gentle, loving, and tender voice.

Follow the Way of Blessing

Therefore, you kings, be wise;
be warned, you rulers of the earth.
Serve the Lord with fear
and celebrate his rule with trembling.
Kiss his son, or he will be angry
and your way will lead to your destruction,
for his wrath can flare up in a moment.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him
(verses 10–12)

God takes no pleasure in judging the world. He would rather save people than judge them. In response to rebellious human beings he tells them to: “be wise,” “be warned,” “serve the Lord with fear,” and “celebrate his rule.” Most importantly he tells them to “kiss the son.” God offers peace, not war. But, he will not force his love and mercy upon those who rebel. To “kiss the son” means humbly approaching the great king and submitting to his rule and reign in our lives. Bow your knee or he will bow it for you. The hands we are told to kiss are the same ones nails were driven into. He was crucified in your place for your sins. He died and three days later rose from the grave conquering sin, Satan and death. One day, he will come again to judge the living and the dead. On that day the wicked will finally be punished, but it will also be a day of grace for those who take refuge in him. It’s only by taking refuge in Jesus that the judgment awaiting the wicked can be avoided.

Psalm 1 began with the word *blessed* and Psalm 2 ends with *blessed*. Those who allow their lives to be ruled by God, those who take refuge in him, will live lives that are blessed. Psalm 1 tells us to become a tree planted by streams of water, putting our roots down deep into the Word of God. In Psalm 2, we see Jesus Christ, the Messiah, God himself being personally involved in the world, often behind the scenes, but still there ruling.

It’s easy to be intimidated and feel weak against these powers. The world intimidates us into hiding. It makes us believe we can do nothing and have no power. But, we can pray. We can learn

how to trust God. We can laugh with him. And we can share the life-giving message of Jesus with others. If we have a small view of God, then there's nothing we can do. But, if our view of God is big, if we believe he is truly sovereign and in control of everything, our prayers take on much more power! God is not only interested in your own life, he's also very active in the cities and nations of our world. He wants to invade and redeem everywhere we live, where we go to school, go to work, and play. The best part is he wants **you** to join him in his great rescue plan.

John Phillips in his commentary shares a story about Richard the Lion Heart that I'd like to end with:

“Richard was a born leader of men—general, fighter, wrestler, runner, poet, and the courtliest knight who ever put on shining armor. He was thirty-two when he came to the throne. He led the Third Crusade determined to take the East the most powerful and best-equipped army which had ever crossed the seas.

“But while he was away trouncing Saladin, his kingdom fell on hard times. His chancellor abused his office and Richard's brother John plotted to seize the throne. John was selfish and cruel, crafty and cynical, lustful and false.

“When news came to England that Richard had been imprisoned and held for ransom by Leopold of Austria, John was delighted. Working with the King of France, John planned to seize England for himself while the people suffered and longed for the return of the king. Richard's coming was delayed.

“Then one day Richard came. He landed in England and marched straight to his throne. Great Richard laid claim to his realm and none dared stand in his path. The people shouted their delight. The Lion was back! Long live the king!

“One day a greater King than Richard will lay claim to a greater realm than England. Those who have abused His absence, seized His vast estates, mismanaged His world, will all be swept aside. The world has not yet seen the last of Jesus.”

This is a Psalm of great hope. God's people look forward to the day when all of God's enemies will be removed, when Jesus will sit on his throne, when the world will be made right, and where peace and victory will prevail. Here's the promise of Psalm 2: Even though God's rule is constantly opposed, God still reigns.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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