

GOD'S WORD TO THE WORLD



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A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

God's Word to the World
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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Welcome to *God's Word to the World*

God intends His Word to be the joy and rejoicing of heart for all people. But all some folks can see in the Bible are unreasonable restraints and unpalatable priorities.

It falls to those who know the Scriptures as God's Word of joy to take that Word to the world, and to proclaim it fully and with power.

Psalm 2 provides an excellent outline for us to follow in thinking about being bringers of joy to our Personal Mission Field. Here God responds to the raging and vanity of the world by declaring His Word and pointing to Jesus.

This is our calling and mandate as well.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Rage and Vanity

*Why do the nations rage,
And the people plot a vain thing?
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." Psalm 2.1-3*

The rage of nations

In 1919, observing the devastation and confusion in the wake of World War I, Irish poet William Butler Yeats reflected on the state of humankind, a situation which must have struck him as a kind of insanity.

Things were falling apart everywhere. Spiritual, moral, social, cultural, and relational centers had lost their centripetal power, and civilization seemed to be gyrating uncontrollably away from its traditional moorings. Good people seemed to have lapsed into a kind of complacency, while those with evil intentions were dominating world event.

As Yeats considered the potential for re-establishing rationality to the world, he was not encouraged. In his poem, *The Second Coming*, he wrote concerning the world of his day and those who must now try to put it back together,

*Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.*

The world was in a rage, as Yeats saw it, and he despaired of anything but terror, violence, uncertainty, and horror in the days to come. At the end of his poem he asked,

*And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
slouches toward Bethlehem to be born?*

A century of rage and vanity

Yeats was something of a prophet. As Paul Johnson demonstrates in his masterful history of the 20th century, *Modern Times*, the combined effects of Darwinism, Marxism, and Freudianism on the world of the 20th century were devastating. The world went mad, but only because its basic assumptions, desires, and purposes had been severed from the root of Christian civilization which, as Yeats saw it, was already rapidly slipping away at the beginning of the century.

If ever a passage of Scripture could be said to describe the world we live in, it must be these opening verses of Psalm 2. The Lord's anointed King observed the world – not just of our day or His, but, in many ways, of every generation – thrashing about in rage and tumult. Wars, oppression, immorality, indecency, wickedness, violence, and death – these were the hallmarks of the 20th century, as Paul Johnson reports, and, alas, they continue to be all too familiar to and present with us in our day as well. They are the result of spiritual forces of wickedness enlisting powerful economic, political, and military entities in a mad effort to throw off the rule of God and establish human autonomy over all of life (cf. Rev. 16.13, 14).

God's Word to the World

“Why do the nations rage?” the Lord’s Messiah asks. And of what does their rage consist? The rulers and leaders of the world want to throw off the “bonds” and “cords” of God, by which He seeks to shape and direct them. Here is a reference to the Law of God, which has been written on the heart of every human being (Rom. 2.14, 15). In Hosea 11.4 God explained that His Law was given out of His loving kindness, so that men might love Him and one another as they are created to do.

But the world in every generation strives to break free of God’s Law, and all His Word, and to become a law unto itself (cf. Rom. 1.18-32). Raging and lurching and flailing about in all kinds of directions, a world striving to break free of God’s love and truth, and to become a law unto itself will only end up torturing and destroying itself.

Nor can it fully and finally be free of the lingering memory of the Law of God. It is futile – a vain thing – for people to try to escape something that is so much an aspect of their very being. Made in the image of God, all human beings have His Law written on their hearts. And though they deny it, suppress and shout down its voice, and try to bury the memory of God in the lies and half-truths of false worldviews and selfish desires, they are what they are – the image-bearers of God – and their raging and denials can never alter that fact.

God's Word to the world

The raging and vanity of the world do not escape the notice of God. He remains sovereign, regardless of how loudly He is denied, denounced, or disobeyed. His rule extends throughout the vast cosmos and over all the earth, and He will accomplish His good purposes in His way and time. He does not simply bear with the nations while they, like children throwing a tantrum because their parent won’t let them put their fingers into the electrical socket, eagerly seek to be free of His commands.

God has a Word for the world, a Word of warning, promise, command, hope, and joy.

And it falls to us, who know the Lord and His Messiah, to make His Word known.

For reflection

1. Do you think “rage and vanity” is a good way to describe the state of our world today? Why or why not?
2. In what ways is the Law of God like cords and bands of love?
3. Why can human beings never completely escape God or His Law? Explain.

Next steps – Conversation: As you understand it, what is God’s Word for the world? How does He respond to the raging and vanity of those who refuse to live by His standards and will? Talk with some Christian friends about this question.

2 The Lord's Response

*He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;
The LORD shall hold them in derision.
Then He shall speak to them in His wrath,
And distress them in His deep displeasure:
"Yet I have set My King
On My holy hill of Zion." Psalm 2:4-6*

The nations in tumult

These days, many of the political, intellectual, scientific, cultural, economic, academic, and military leaders of the world act as if they have little or no responsibility toward, or regard for, the God of Scripture.

In fact, this is not an act at all. It's simply the way contemporary men and women have come to view the proceedings of history and the world. God may or may not exist; but, even if He does, He doesn't interfere in the affairs of men and nations, people and things. He's only about comforting us in our times of trial – if we're so weak as to require such comforting.

But since there are an awful lot of affairs of men and nations, as well as people and things, somebody has to make sense of all this and give direction to it. Which is where many of today's movers-and-shakers have positioned themselves. Deceived by spiritual forces of wickedness in high places, full of themselves and their ideas and schemes, slaves to the Lie (Rom. 1:25), and determined to secure a spread in the pages of history, world leaders and their followers rage in vain against the sovereign God of heaven and earth, Who made them, loves them, and cares for them in minute detail, even despite their scorn for and denial of Him (Ps. 52:1; Matt. 5:44, 45).

How does the Lord in heaven respond to this state of affairs? Does He just ignore it and hope it won't affect Him? Does He wring His hands and fret, like His people do, worried about infringements on their religious liberties, constraints on their freedom of speech, or whether their latest version of contemporary worship is just not sufficiently hip to make the lost world like them?

Hardly. As the nations rage and rail against Him, God simply laughs. It is a sad laugh, an ironic laugh, a knowing laugh, and a laugh of derision. And that laughter of God, present in every age, introduces His Word to the world, the Word He calls His people to understand and proclaim.

Pointing to His King

In brief, God's response to the raging of the world is to point to His King, enthroned over His Church, and advancing His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven (Ps. 45:6). The Lord's answer to the rebellion of our age is neither political, nor cultural, nor economic. It is spiritual and personal, centered in the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and gesturing toward the new reality of His Kingdom.

Men rage against God with fire in their minds, as James H. Billington explained, referring to the revolutionary passion for autonomy in *Fire in the Minds of Men*. God, however, does not fight fire with fire. He does not offer dissatisfied, disobedient men new and better ideas. He does not hold out to them improved systems and institutions, or more conservative leaders and traditional values.

His response to the raging of the nations is not to recommend more wholesome culture.

Instead, God gestures toward true and full reality, a spiritual realm which, having once dawned cannot be extinguished and must drive back the darkness of vanity and rage wherever it becomes established in the

souls of those who believe (Dan. 2.44, 45; 1 Jn. 2.8). Men rage against God and His Law; God points to Jesus and the work He has accomplished in destroying the devil and his deceiving ways, and opening the gate to eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

Not relevant?

Doubtless to some, such a response to worldwide moral, cultural, and political rebellion will seem simplistic. "The world doesn't want to hear about the Kingdom of God!" some will insist. "Give us something more relevant to the needs of our alienated generation!"

But what could be more relevant than that alone which can heal the rebellion in men's souls and overcome their alienation to God, others, the world, and themselves? So the world doesn't want to hear about the Kingdom of God. They're raging vainly in rebellion against the very idea! And shall we take our cues concerning our message from madmen?

The Kingdom of God is real. It is a spiritual power for turning the world upside-down, overthrowing every vain pretense of even the most powerful and persuasive pontificators, and establishing a reign of righteousness, peace, and joy in the hearts of men and the nations of the world (1 Cor. 4.20; Acts 17.1-9; Rom. 4.17, 18).

How do we respond to the rebellion and raging of the world in our day? Do we join in the laughter of God? Are we looking to the cure toward which He gestures? And are we determined, as citizens and ambassadors of His new spiritual nation, to accept our calling to carry His Word to the world?

For reflection

1. What do you make of God's laughing in response to the raging of the nations? How should this instruct us?
2. How would you summarize the substance of God's response to the raging of the nations? What are the implications for us, God's people?
3. What do we mean by saying that God "does not fight fire with fire" in responding to the people and nations of the earth?

Next steps – Conversation: Paul says we are ambassadors of King Jesus (2 Cor. 5.17-21). What does that involve in your daily life? How do you represent the King and His Kingdom to a world raging against God? Talk with some Christian friends about these questions.

3 The King and His Inheritance

*"I will declare the decree:
The LORD has said to Me,
You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You.
Ask of Me, and I will give You
The nations for Your inheritance,
And the ends of the earth for Your possession.
You shall break them with a rod of iron;
You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel."* Psalm 2.7-9

A deadly corrosive

Augustine described the human desire for autonomy as a "deadly corrosive." Once established in the human heart, the determination to become a law unto oneself corrupts, corrodes, and eats away every vestige of decency, civility, and neighbor love inherent in being the image-bearer of God.

And, as with all corrosion, the desire for autonomy – to be free of all constraints, especially those imposed by God – spreads to every area of human life and interest.

God is not content to allow this situation to continue. He has made provision for rescuing men from their rage and vanity and liberating them, as His sons and daughters, into His Kingdom of light and truth and life. He holds out for the world the prospect of a life of joy and rejoicing, which we can only know as we feed on His glory in His Word. As the prophet Daniel foresaw, God has established His Kingdom on earth. Since the last days of the Roman Empire, it continues to grow and expand, overcoming every expression of hubris and corruption and bringing forgiveness, life, hope, and joy to multitudes (Dan. 2.44, 45).

But only on condition they *bear* and *heed* the call to enter His Kingdom and glory (1 Thess. 2.12; Rom. 10.13-17).

King of the World

"He rules the world with truth and grace..." So Christians all over the world sing once a year during the Christmas season. We sing it joyfully, glorying in the incarnation of the Babe in the manger, grateful for the salvation we have obtained through Him. "He rules the world with truth and grace..." So we sing. But do we really believe this? Believe it enough to proclaim it year-round to our neighbors and the world?

God's King is enthroned over Zion. That is, He rules over and through His Church, as the writer of Hebrews teaches (Heb. 12.22-28). Christ is King *over* His Church, but that does not mean that His power and dominion are *limited* to those who believe in Him. Christ has been given power to break the nations, to cast their leaders aside, like useless shards, to reduce their empires to dust, to grind their economies to a halt, and to crush their armies and all their raging, vain aspirations.

By virtue of the work He accomplished in dying for sin and rising again from the dead, Jesus Christ has been appointed Messiah and King and Lord of all nations and all creation. He truly does rule the world, even now, and He is advancing His dominion in and through His faithful followers. No one and no nation can stand against Him when He determines to bring them either to obedience or destruction. He is God's Answer to the vain raging of men corrupted by the desire to be free of God.

And of the increase of His Kingdom and righteousness, as Isaiah prophesied, there will be no end (Is. 9.6, 7).

No end?

Really? No end? Does He rule the world more than at Christmas time? More than merely in the hearts of those who confess Him as Messiah and King? Is His Kingdom really like a growing stone, which will engage and overthrow every opposing worldview until the knowledge of the glory of God and the joy and rejoicing of life in His Word, covers the earth as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2.14)?

Or is Scripture simply mistaken on these matters?

Scripture is not mistaken. But we are, if we think that, just because certain people today may not wish to hear about Christ and His work of redemption, that we should not bother them by mentioning it. If you saw your neighbor about to step out in front of a steam roller, would you consider that to be none of your business? Would you simply say to yourself, "Oh, he won't want to hear me, because, after all, I hardly even know him"?

Something much more serious than a steam roller is advancing over the earth. Every day King Jesus rides out, armed with His Word in the power of His Spirit, to reclaim the fallen world, which is His rightful inheritance (Ps. 45.6; Ps. 111.6; Rev. 6.1). Nothing can stand against Him as He plunders the devil of his former holdings and takes unto Himself what is rightfully His (Matt. 12.22-29). Whoever, like pliant clay, places himself in the King's hands, to be shaped and molded by His pleasure and for His purposes, is born again into a realm of beauty, fruitfulness, and joy such as can only be imagined by those who have never known it. Those who resist His advances He will smash like brittle stone, and sweep away with the broom of His wrath.

The King has come. The King is advancing His rule. And the King is coming again. The earth is the Lord's and everything and everyone in it (Ps. 24.1). This is the message entrusted to us; let us go boldly to the world, wielding His Word like a sword, and tell them that their rightful Ruler is at hand.

For reflection

1. Augustine said that the desire for autonomy is a "deadly corrosive." What is autonomy? Why is it a deadly corrosive? Can you cite evidence of this in our world today?
2. Meditate on Isaiah 9.6, 7. When did the King come to earth? When did His Kingdom begin? How does Isaiah teach us to think about the state of that Kingdom through the course of human history?
3. Meditate on the words of "Joy to the World!" Does it seem to you either that Christians who sing this song don't really understand its message, or don't really believe it? Explain.

Next steps – Preparation: Take a few minutes to reflect on your sphere of influence (cf. 2 Cor. 10.13-18). This is your [Personal Mission Field](#). What is your duty in this sphere as the King's subject and ambassador? Share your thoughts about this matter with a Christian friend.

4 A Word of Warning

*Now therefore, be wise, O kings;
Be instructed, you judges of the earth.
Serve the LORD with fear,
And rejoice with trembling.
Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,
And you perish in the way,
When His wrath is kindled but a little.* Psalm 2:10-12

The King and His Kingdom

God's response to the raging and vanity of those who do not wish to have Him rule over them consists of the announcement that a new King is on the throne of the world and a new Kingdom has begun its advance against all kingdoms, worldviews, and rebellious men.

Jesus Christ is God's Anointed One, and to Him has been granted as an inheritance all the nations of the world and every creature in the vast cosmos. Over them all He rules with truth and grace. And He intends to make the nations prove the glories of His righteousness.

This announcement of King Jesus and His Kingdom has been entrusted to the loyal subjects of this Sovereign. We who have believed in Him are appointed for the task both of embodying the reality of the Kingdom of God and of calling the nations to forsake their folly and force their way, by grace through faith, into the Kingdom of life (Lk. 16:16). All our reading and study and meditation in God's Word should lead us to this conclusion, this calling, this life of obedience. We are witnesses to the King and His Kingdom, and His Word of promise and warning is in our hands.

But we must be certain that we understand all the various aspects of this message, so that we make our appeal to the vain and raging lost souls in our spheres of influence according to the receptors and chords that resonate most powerfully in their souls.

And the first of these is fear.

Living in fear

People today live, to varying degrees, lives of fear. Above all, as the writer of Hebrews explains, they fear death (Heb. 2:15). They fear the pain of it, the loss of it, and the uncertainty of what lies beyond it. Many people today fear not having a job or being able to provide for themselves and their loved ones. They fear losing the things they cherish most, or missing the good life as they envision it because of some unforeseeable tragedy or disaster. They fear terror. They fear pain and suffering. They fear the whims of the economy. They fear what others might think about them.

All these fears – and they are very real – serve to remind us that men are made for fear. God, Who made us in His image, intends fear to be a driving force in the decisions we make and the lives we choose.

But fear can only do its proper work when it is rightly focused and sufficiently engaged. And those whose fear is only attached to the things of their temporal experience are not fearing wisely. No small part of our message from God to the world is that the world should look past all its petty, temporal fears and learn, as Jesus warned, to fear Him Who can destroy both body and soul in hell (Matt. 10:28). "Now what does the Lord require of you," the Lord asks through His servant Moses, "but to fear Him..." (Deut. 10:12).

We must present Jesus Christ to the world as a King and Sovereign and Ruler to be *feared* because of what He

is capable of doing to those who oppose His will. He can break them as with a rod of iron, and smash them into pieces like a potter's vessel. He Who upholds the universe and everything in it by the Word of His power, Who brings the storms and sends the lightning, Who stills and stirs the seas, breaks the mountains, cracks open the earth, explodes planets, and sustains whole galaxies – He has power to wield according to His pleasure, and His pleasure is that men should *fear* Him.

A day is coming, and is at hand

The wrath of King Jesus, our psalm explains, can suddenly flare. No man knows the day of his death. I recall a witnessing situation I was involved in with Jim Kennedy one time. Jim had shared the Gospel patiently, clearly, and lovingly – as he always did – and the young man he was talking with explained that, while he was sure that everything he had told him was true, he just wasn't quite ready to believe. Soon, he insisted, or sometime later, but not right now. To which Jim responded, "Then promise me one thing, will you, my friend? Between now and the time you decide to give your life to Jesus, don't die first."

No man knows the day of his death. But the wrath of Jesus doesn't wait for men to die. The wrath of God is even now being poured out against all manner of unrighteousness and ungodliness, and men who persist in opposing God and His Anointed King should know that their Maker and Sovereign will give them up to increasing corruption, hardness of heart, and the growing fears and dangers of an increasingly corrosive and corrupted world, for this is the way He is bringing His wrath to bear against the nations in our time (Rom. 1.18-32).

Now we may convince only a few with such an approach. But that's not our problem. We have a sword to wield (Ps. 149); we are entrusted with a message – God's Word to the world – and that message of a new King and His advancing Kingdom must include a serious and well-pointed warning concerning Whom to fear and why.

For as long as men do not fear our King, they will have no reason to obey Him.

For reflection

1. Do you agree that fear is a basic human affection? And that God intends to use fear in directing people's behavior? Why or why not?
2. God commanded men to fear Him. Why should we fear God? Is it really all that important to fear God? Why or why not?
3. Can we truly love and serve God if we do not fear Him? Explain:

Next steps – Conversation: Would you say that you fear God? Why or why not? Meditate on Hebrews 12.3-11. Does the writer seem to be encouraging us to fear God? Meditate on 2 Corinthians 7.1. What is the relationship between fearing God and growing in the Lord? Talk with some Christian friends about these questions.

5 A Word of Promise

*Serve the LORD with fear,
And rejoice with trembling,
Kiss the Son...* Psalm 2.11, 12

Called to proclaim

The Apostle Peter explained that those who believe in Jesus have been constituted as a new nation (1 Pet. 2.9, 10). We have been translated by God into the Kingdom of His Son, the Kingdom of life and light and glory and beauty and goodness and justice and love. Christians have emerged from the storm-tossed shell of their battered lives and cruel world, into the bright new dawn of a day they never imagined they could know.

We definitely aren't in Kansas anymore, Toto.

Those who have experienced this Kingdom, and who live in the very presence of its King, "under the heavens," know that nothing in this world "under the sun," as Solomon would say, can compare with the intimate communion, sweet fellowship, and transforming power of Jesus Christ. Peter says that those who inhabit this new realm are called to proclaim the excellencies of God and His King to the whole world. We want everyone to know the joy and hope and glory we live in, and to escape the fears, guilt, and folly of their rebellious, raging, and vain lives.

We are the joy of the Lord to our world, each of us within our own spheres of influence.

Our message begins by declaring the existence of a new reality, a new realm of being – the Kingdom of God – and a King Who is so powerful, absolute, and unchanging in His rule that nothing and no one can stand against His will. We challenge the rebels of this age at their most receptive point – the point of fear – and we call on them to fear Him Who can destroy in wrath any who think they can oppose Him and His will.

But, in the same breath, and with just as much passion, we must proclaim the great promise of entering into the intimate fellowship, companionship, safety, and love of this self-same Sovereign.

Kiss the Son!

How strange it seems that God calls sinners, not to grovel before His King, but to throw their arms around Him and kiss Him with trembling and rejoicing! I can tell you, I remember the first time I ever kissed Susie. Trembling and rejoicing gets at it pretty well, and, frankly, still does. Rebellious sinners, raging insanely against the sovereign God and His anointed King, men up to their eyeballs in self-love and all its corrosive effects, horrible people, and people who outwardly look fine but inwardly are snakes poised to strike – people like you and me – God calls us all to step up to the throne and launch ourselves into the loving lap of our only Savior and Lord.

God's Word to the world is that they must fear His King. But, at the very same time, His call to them is to see in Jesus such beauty, compassion, mercy, wonder, and loveliness – such kindness, tenderness, meekness, and friendliness – that they need have no fear of holding out their hands to Him and approaching Him in an embrace of love. He stands ready to receive as many as will believe in Him, and to draw them into Himself, into His love, into the new birth and new life of love and glory, joy and rejoicing, which is the experience and hope of all who truly know the Lord.

The desire to love and be loved is the second receptor and chord of the human heart that our proclamation must seek to strum. Everyone wants to be loved, to know they are accepted and will be embraced and cared for. And everyone wants to give himself for such love as much as he wants to be loved. So when we

announce to vainly raging sinners that, in spite of how foolish and sinful they are, King Jesus loves them so much that He has taken their sins on Himself and submitted to God's judgment on their behalf, we begin to strum that love receptor in their souls, so that they can be drawn to Him with trembling and rejoicing.

A calling to love

The Kingdom of God is a realm where love obtains, after the example and in the living power of the very King of Love, Who is Shepherd of all the flocks He has purchased with His blood. Kissing the Son is the great, ongoing privilege of all who truly know Him. Imagine if you will, because this is what the psalmist intends us to do, putting your face next to the face of Jesus. Smell the sweet myrrh and cassia of His robes (Ps. 45.8). Feel the smoothness of His glorious white hair, and let the warm glow of His flashing eyes penetrate your soul (Rev. 1.14). Put your cheek against His, and your lips upon His jaw. Kiss the Son, and feel the joy that He feels in receiving you, the strength of His arms as He holds you, the merging and meshing of your being with His as you commune in utmost intimacy with the Ruler of all creation.

Now imagine living this way every moment of every day of your life, for this is the calling and promise to all who truly know King Jesus, who dwell in His Kingdom of love and who say with the Apostle, "For me to live is Christ!" (Phil. 1.21) For all who believe, our lives have been hidden with Christ in God. We are united with Him, participate in Him, conduct our daily lives in Him, and proclaim Him and His joyous Kingdom to our world.

What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul! What wondrous love is this! God's Word to the world is a message of love, and once we've begun to know that love truly, we will be eager to proclaim it passionately to the lost people in our world.

For reflection

1. How can God command us both to fear and love Him? How do these two affections work together to help us know a proper and fruitful relationship with God?
2. Reflect on the exercise recommended in this lesson ("Imagine if you will..."). Is this the way you experience your relationship with King Jesus? Explain.
3. "Now imagine living this way every moment of every day of your life, for this is the calling and promise to all who truly know King Jesus, who dwell in His Kingdom of love and who say with the Apostle, 'For me to live is Christ! (Phil. 1.21)'" How could you begin to see this statement be more true of your life each day?

Next steps – Conversation: Read again the last section of this article, beneath the heading A calling to love. How do you respond to this way of thinking about your relationship with Jesus? Share this article with a friend, and get together to talk about it.

6 A Word of Command

*Serve the LORD with fear,
And rejoice with trembling.* Psalm 2.11

A message of fact, fear, and following

God's Word to the world, as we have seen it thus far in Psalm 2, may be described as a message of fact, fear, and following. The *fact* is that something has happened in human history, and nothing is quite the way people think it is. A King has ascended an eternal throne, and He is advancing a true and full Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. This is not just religious-speak. This is not just future hope. This is now, and has been for nearly 2,000 years. And there's plenty of evidence throughout history to support our announcement of this fact.

This fact is a call to *fear* the King Who rules with such world-changing power, because His wrath can suddenly flare up against those who oppose Him. But it's also a message of *following*, following this King in love, since this invincible King invites us into the communion of His throne room, to enjoy His fellowship and share in His love forever.

All this is because of what this King has done to attain His lofty position – fulfilling the righteousness we lack, taking the judgment we deserve, breaking the bonds of fear and death, and opening the eyes of our heart to see through the lies and half-truths of our vain and raging world.

Jesus does not invite

We call on raging sinners – like we used to be (and sometimes, alas, still are) – to see this King, King Jesus, for Who He is, to understand what He has done and is doing, to embrace Him in fear and trembling, and to follow Him with rejoicing and love. That sounds like we are inviting people to make a choice, asking them to compare our offer with their preferred way of making sense out of their lives. They can choose Jesus, but if they want to choose some other ideal of the good life, some other hoped-for bounty and boon, some other less demanding and perhaps more lenient deity, well, then, that's their choice. Have a nice day.

But that's not the case. King Jesus, you see, does not *invite*. He *commands*. He is commanding all people everywhere to repent and believe the Good News (Acts 17.30, 31). And in His commands, the only choice He offers is whether the one so commanded will live or die.

But what Jesus commands is completely in line with how people are by nature inclined. So again, we're appealing to a receptor and chord in a person's soul which, in the light of a King so loving and lovable, can make perfectly good sense to many who hear this Word from God to the world.

Follow and serve

For what Jesus commands of raging, vain sinners is that they should follow and serve Him. Now, as Bob Dylan reminded us some years back, "everybody serves something." Everyone is a worshiper of some high ideal and hope; everyone's everyday life is an altar of sacrifice to that ideal and hope; and every conscious activity we engage is designed to move us closer to realizing that ideal and hope. What we follow and serve may thus be only a figment of our imagination, and turn out to be but a vain hope. But follow and serve it we will, for this is how we have been created.

If we have managed to persuade someone of the reality of Christ's Kingdom, the danger of trying to resist Him, and the altogether wonderful and glorious life that awaits those who embrace Him, becoming a devoted *follower and servant* of King Jesus will mark out the new course which, in *redirected* fear and love, the Spirit of God carves in a person's soul.

Following and serving Jesus has two aspects to it, based on two different meanings of the Hebrew word, *avad*. Our English translations capture these different nuances, the New King James Version translating the word as *serve*, and the New American Standard Bible rendering it, *worship*. Both are correct. What Jesus commands of those who would enter His Kingdom, escape His wrath, and inhabit His love and joy, is that they follow Him as worshipers and servants. No longer will they worship and devote their lives to false deities, man-made religions, or worldviews constructed by the vain and raging imaginations of men. Now, as a daily journey of following Christ, they will learn to worship their King and discover what it means to serve Him in every area of their lives.

They are truly wise, Psalm 2 explains, who become worshipers of King Jesus and take up lives of service in His Name, submitting to His Word, advancing His Kingdom, embodying His love, and spreading the reality and the message of His rule in every situation and circumstance of their lives.

King Jesus commands the nations to cease following their foolish aspirations and serving their vain imaginations, and to begin following and serving Him. He does not invite, as though the pleasure of your company would be greatly appreciated. We add nothing to the joy and pleasure God knows completely in Himself alone. No, Jesus does not invite; He *commands*, and all who acknowledge His authority and appreciate His grace understand that *what* He commands is in their best interests.

And all those who refuse to bow to His commands will shortly discover that resistance to the rule of King Jesus is a deadly gambit.

Everybody follows and serves something. God's message to the world is that the way of wisdom is to follow and serve Jesus Christ.

For reflection

1. Jesus doesn't invite; He commands. Discuss the implications of this for the way we present the Good News of Jesus and the Kingdom to others:
2. Why does it make sense that the words *worship* and *serve* derive from the same basic Hebrew word (also the word *work*)?
3. Would you agree with the idea that everybody is following and serving someone or something? Why is this a good *receptor* or *chord* for presenting the Gospel?

Next steps – Conversations: Why do you suppose the words worship and serve and work are connected in the same root word? In what ways are they similar? Does Romans 12.1, 2 help you in thinking about this? Is your worship a form of service to God? Is your service done as an expression of worship? Talk about these questions with some Christian friends.

7 A Word of Hope

Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him. Psalm 2:12

Ab, happiness!

These days happiness is an elusive commodity. People pursue it in various ways. Many shake free of what they regard as the constraints (bonds and cords) of religion, and set out to establish themselves as lords and masters, hoping to discover a path toward a dream or ideal condition which is for them the embodiment of *happiness*.

But as is frequently reported in studies and editorials and advice columns and talk shows and bio-dramas, happiness, real lasting happiness, is hard to come by, and difficult to retain.

People today don't have a very clear idea about happiness. Ask them what the good life looks like for them, and they'll start defining it in terms of material things, comfortable surroundings, and sensual pleasures. The more they experience these as the happiness they seek, however, the less appealing they become. The less it seems that these things or pleasures will provide the happiness they feel they really want, the more they cast about for some new arrangement of the same.

But happiness is deeper than things or experiences. It is a sense, deep in one's soul, that regardless of circumstances or outward conditions of life, everything is OK. It's all good, come what may.

Most people realize that the promise of happiness – the perpetual realization of that sense of overall wellbeing and contentment – is a kind of crap shoot. Hence the bumper sticker, "Life's a bitch, then you die." Happiness seems to slip away just about the time we think we've attained it. And this is because, as I've said, most people look to things and experiences to bring them happiness. But happiness, being inward and, yes, even spiritual, cannot be satisfied by temporal means.

The promise of happiness

What God's Word to the world promises, nevertheless, is just this – happiness. The Hebrew word, *asbré* – here translated *blessed* – means something like "completely happy, fulfilled, content, and at peace." This is what awaits those who hear and heed the message of the King and His Kingdom, the Savior Who commands all men everywhere to repent, fear and love Him, believe the Good News of the Kingdom, and be born again by grace through faith. All who trust in King Jesus, who take refuge in Him against the fears, uncertainties, and vain raging of an age in flight from God – all who thus come to Jesus will know the blessing – the happiness – they seek within their souls.

They will know true joy and rejoicing *in their heart*, and not their circumstance, as all who have come to know Jesus can testify out of their own experience (cf. Ps. 107).

Why are Christians the most selfless and generous of all peoples? Why have they, historically, been able to sustain long and successful marriages, to give themselves for the needs of others, and to know joy even in the midst of adversity? It's because they are blessed in *Jesus* and not just in circumstances or things. They know joy and rejoicing by being in the presence of Jesus, dwelling within His Kingdom, enjoying His companionship, and following and serving Him according to His commands.

The Christian's happiness is confirmation both of what people hope for in their own souls – that real happiness does exist – and of what God declares in His Word to the world.

The happiness God offers to all who take refuge in Jesus Christ is neither conditional nor temporary. It is

God's Word to the World

permanent, eternal, and unfailing because it is lodged in the eternal Person, illimitable power, and unchanging love of the King of Glory. In Him, within His Kingdom, living as His worshipers and servants in fear of Him and love for Him, men and women come to know true and lasting happiness. And it's a happiness that increases without changing as one's relationship with Jesus becomes more consistent and comprehensive of every area of life.

Indeed, it is more than happiness; it is joy.

God's Word to the world

This is God's Word to a world in rebellion against Him. The world is falling apart; its centers are losing their integrity and allure. The worst people in the world seem to have the most conviction and so work the hardest to further their self-serving and often violent ends. Meanwhile, the best have become too complacent or distracted even to care. What rough beast awaits those who rage against God and pursue lives of vanity?

Jesus is the hope of the world. His Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit is the only safe refuge from ultimate corruption and despair. And we, citizens and ambassadors of His realm, called to let the Word of God dwell in us richly (Col. 3.16), are commissioned to take God's Word to the world so that whosoever believes in and obeys Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (Jn. 3.16).

The world will not fail to continue its vain raging. Let us not fail in our high and holy calling to take God's Word of Christ and His Kingdom to the world we inhabit each day.

For reflection

1. Do you agree that hope is an elusive commodity? The people in your life sphere (2 Cor. 10.13-18) – are they mostly hopeful or unhelpful? Explain.
2. How do you respond to the definition of "happiness" presented here? Do you agree that such happiness, consistent and growing, is only available in Jesus? Why or why not?
3. What is God's Word to the world?

Next steps – Preparation: In what ways might your church better prepare you to be a citizen and ambassador of the Kingdom of God? What can you do to help in this matter?

God's Word to the World

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Can we expect to take God's Word to the world unless the Word of God dwells in us richly? Explain.
2. What *receptors* or *chords* should we try to reach or strum in the souls of those to whom we bring God's Word? Why these?
3. What is God's Word to the world? Suggest some ways Christians can fulfill this calling to wield the Sword of the Spirit and take God's Word to the world.
4. What are the biggest obstacles preventing you from fulfilling this calling? How could your fellow believers help you overcome these obstacles?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you implementing that lesson in your walk with and work for the Lord?

For prayer?

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.