

REBEL YELL

PSALM 2 JULY 5, 2020

Yay-hoo. Woo-hoo. Yee-haw. You may have used one of those in a text thread recently, but it might surprise you to learn that they are descriptions of the once-famous “rebel yell” that Confederate soldiers would shriek out as they rode into battle.¹

In a 1905 edition of *Confederate Veteran Magazine*, Confederate Colonel Keller Anderson described it this way: “[The yell was a] do-or-die expression, [a] maniacal maelstrom of sound; [a] penetrating, rasping, shrieking, blood-curdling noise...whose volume reached the heavens.”²

The rebel yell wasn’t unique to the Southern States. It had similar counterparts in Native American war calls and the screams of Scottish Highlanders.³ But, more than that, God tells us that it is the natural expression of every human heart and every human society. A blasphemous howl, angry and violent, the noise mankind makes in rebellion against our Creator God, who rules heaven and earth.

When you go to the book of Psalms you discover many different types of songs. Songs for pilgrims and songs for kings. Songs for the temple and songs for the wilderness. Songs for victors and songs for the oppressed. At the very entrance to this wonderful book, after being told in Psalm 1 the key to living a happy life, full of purpose and growth, we’re then given something remarkable: Not a song for servants or for the faithful, but a song for *rebels*. The people of God aren’t addressed at all. Instead, heaven sings a melody of invitation to the treasonous enemies of God, hoping that they will lay down their arms in surrender and be saved from certain defeat.

Along the way we are introduced to the most important character of all human history: Christ the Messiah. The King, whose rule is sure, whose coming is unstoppable and who will destroy all who stand against Him. But then, we also see that this King of fierce wrath is also a King of matchless love. He’s a King who can be approached, *even by traitors*, and receive forgiveness.

There’s a lot of talk these days about being on “the right side of history.” Psalm 2, the song for rebels, confronts you with the question of whether you are on the right side of *eternal* history. The King is coming. Have you attached yourself to Him?

Our song has no introduction, but we’re told in the book of Acts that it was written by David. Though it may have been used in coronation ceremonies, it’s clear that this Psalm looks far beyond any mortal monarch to the King of all kings, the Only Begotten Son of God. It’s quoted at least 7 times in the New Testament, 3 of those in the Revelation of Jesus Christ. As it opens, we’re not shown a King on His throne, but an angry mob coming together hoping to overthrow Him.

Psalm 2:1-2 - ¹ Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ² The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers conspire together against the Lord and his Anointed One:

Having seen the goodness of God and His rich promises in Psalm 1, having seen how *kind* God is to individuals and nations who will repent from sin and give themselves to Him, whether it’s a man like Abraham or a city like Nineveh. Having seen what God is willing to do on behalf of those He loves, it

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rebel_yell#Sound

² <https://www.essentialcivilwarcurriculum.com/the-rebel-yell.html>

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rebel_yell#Origins

is bewildering to see this reaction of the human heart to the Lord. David was bewildered. “*Why?!?*” That’s a question that keeps ringing like a bell in our hearts, isn’t it? *Why* is there so much unrest and violence and destruction laying waste to our cities and our relationships and our institutions? *Why* is there so much anger? *Why* is there such a refusal to turn from evil and embrace good?

The rage around us is not new. In fact, the Bible says it’s *normal*. This is the regular operation of the human heart in its unredeemed state.

Isaiah 57 says it this way:

Isaiah 57:20 (NLT) - Those who still reject [God] are like the restless sea, which is never still but continually churns up mud and dirt.

The human heart cannot stay passive when it comes to God. There are many who say they are ‘agnostic,’ they don’t know if God exists or doesn’t, but it doesn’t matter. But that’s not good enough for sin. Sin *must* rebel. It *must* destroy. It *must* tear down and drive a person away from God and His gentle call to reconcile. God’S desire is to heal and comfort those who do not deserve it, yet so many refuse Him and therefore find no peace.

This isn’t just an individual problem, it becomes compounded when fallen human beings group together into nations. Of course, we know that, at His second coming, all the nations of the world will *literally* take a stand against the Lord, but all of human history has shown this type of behavior. Whether it’s like the people there at the Tower of Babel: “Let’s make for ourselves a great tower so that we can show we have no need of God.” Or whether it’s a more modern example like the Soviet Union: “Let’s kill God in our society, and tens of millions of people along with Him.” Human rebellion churns and transforms into a purpose⁴ to fight against God.

What these kings and rulers don’t realize is that all their resistance is futile. But they are determined. And here’s their mission statement:

Psalm 2:3 - ³“Let’s tear off their chains and throw their ropes off of us.”

The human heart is convinced that God’s desire is to enslave us and to beat us down. It’s the very first lie we fell for back in the Garden of Eden. Here we see these rebels yelling about how God is trying to tie us up and put us in chains.

Like most of Satan’s lies there is a kernel of truth. God *does* want to tie us, but *to* what and *with* what?

God says in Hosea that He led His people with ropes of kindness and bonds of love. His desire is to attach us to Himself, that He might bear our burdens and transform our lives and keep us from spiritual shipwreck.⁵ To save individuals and families and even nations by His grace.

It’s true, that God’s kind bonds of love include limits and boundaries. What we find in Scripture is that these do not *confine* us in some prison, but they *protect* us. They are good and beneficial. They show the way the life more abundantly. They’re described in Psalm 1 as a pathway to delight, fulfillment and purpose. These guiding lines are given to us for our personal life, our family life, our

⁴ Barnes’ Notes On The Bible

⁵ 1 Timothy 1:19

life in work and society and the wider world. And they are not simply suggestions or one *potential* way of getting where you want to go, they are commands from the King. A good and gracious King, but the King nonetheless.

Recently we've seen a dramatic and tragic real-world example of the rebel heart of man seeking to throw off all authority. It was called CHAZ. The Capital Hill Autonomous Zone. A group of rebels raging in the streets. 3 weeks, 4 shootings, 2 dead. Untold property damage. Ruined lives. The outworking of rebellion living in the heart of unredeemed man.

In the 1960's, many young people in the counter-culture Hippie movement embraced what they called "free love." It was a throwing off of God's boundaries and guidelines. One that still reverberates today. In 2007, NBC News reported on the longterm fallout of this choice to tear off the chains of chastity and embrace the destructive license of sin. The article writes: "From idealism to despair...There was a price for all that free love. From 1964 through 1968, the rates of syphilis and gonorrhea in California rose 165 percent. Dr. David Smith, who founded the Haight-Ashbury Free Clinic said 'It would be an understatement to say there was a spike in STDs. That's like saying a hurricane is a strong wind.'" The article goes on: "Abortion was another issue that erupted during Summer of Love. By the end of the summer, many women, some of them young teenagers, needed treatment for botched abortions. Enthusiasts of the 1960s...[discovered]...that the free-love train was not going to be a smooth ride."⁶

The human heart, since the fall in the Garden, is ready to choose death rather than life. Which is why we have to take a careful look at who rules on the throne of our hearts. Is it King Jesus, or is it some other? The New Testament calls on us to *crucify* that other king and instead bow our knees to Jesus Christ, the Anointed One, and welcome Him to lead us in bonds of love, tethered to Him under His easy yoke.

This Psalm also brings out the reality that *personal* wickedness leads to *national* wickedness. Today so many leaders of so many nations have taken up the causes of rebellion against God and His ways. It's not just in some far off land. Look at our own nation. The idols we worship. The values we promote and protect. As Christ-loving Christians, we find ourselves not in David's Jerusalem, but Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon. A realm of hatred, violence, anger and sacrilege. We can see it all around us. And God sees it too. Here's His response:

Psalm 2:4 - ⁴The one enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord ridicules them.

God has a sense of humor. He created humor, of course, but it's sometimes good to remind ourselves that God does express emotion. He does so perfectly and in line with His unchanging character, but our God *feels*. Here He is poetically described as *laughing* at these conspiring kings who are in such an uproar against Him.

If that seems like a distasteful image to you, remember this: This is the God who one commentator points out could "with one word or look destroy *all* His enemies."⁷ And yet, He doesn't. Because, despite their wickedness and their rage and their traitorous rebellion, God loves these people. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. At the same time He does truly hate our sin.

⁶ http://www.nbcnews.com/id/19053382/ns/health-sexual_health/t/free-love-was-there-price-pay/

⁷ Benson's Commentary Of The Old And New Testament

But, from heaven's perspective, you can't help but laugh. Imagine, for a moment, that the dust bunnies you were sweeping up from your floor somehow communicated to you that they were going to overthrow you and become the rulers of their own domain.

As the nations rage we see God sitting. He doesn't pace the halls, wringing His hands. Isaiah 18 says:

Isaiah 18:4 (NLT) - "I will watch quietly from my dwelling place— as quietly as the heat rises on a summer day.

God is attentive, patient and full of mercy. But one day the offers He has made to mankind will expire, His long-suffering will come to an end.

Psalm 2:5 - ⁵Then he speaks to them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath:

Even *this* is grace. Again and again God reaches out to this world, to nations, to individuals, trying to save them from themselves and the path of destruction they are rushing down. If they will not respond to His creation or His compassion or His communications, they will be finally consumed by His wrath. It is a *just* wrath against the foul obscenity of man's sin. He *cannot* overlook it. To do so would be an unforgivably immoral act.

Psalm 2:6 - ⁶"I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain."

God is not simply reacting to things happening on earth. He is working out an eternal plan. Here He makes it know to these rebels that He already has a King in place. They may wear crowns, but they are not in charge. There is one, true King: Jesus Christ.

The term God uses in this verse for installed is one that means "poured out."⁸ That's an interesting image. This eternal, holy plan, included the pouring out of Jesus' life on the cross so that He might *deal* with our sin once and for all. The work continued as God poured out His Holy Spirit on His people in the Church age. And now, day after day, the King's work continues as He pours out His grace along with faith and love in us and through us. At the end of human history, the Lord will pour out His terrible fury on those who will not surrender and repent of their sin.

The King has been poured out. He has been installed. But this King is not aloof or withdrawn. He's accessible to anyone. You are welcome to come, at any moment, and bow before Him in worship and service. That's not just for you and me, but for even the great leaders of the world. All of us can be like Prince Jonathan, the son of Saul, who was happy to acknowledge that the throne belonged to David. No protest. No anger. No rebellion. Instead he pledged his love to God's anointed and said, "I'll be there beside you to lift high *your* kingdom."

Psalm 2:7 - ⁷I will declare the Lord's decree. He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father.

Christ Himself joins the song here and speaks until the end of verse 9. When it says that God and Messiah became Father and Son, or perhaps your version says, "today I have begotten You," that doesn't mean that Jesus was created or had a temporal beginning. No, it means that, in the plan of

⁸ Ellicott's Commentary For English Readers

God, the Son was set in place and position. The idea is used in a similar way in Revelation chapter 1. There Jesus is identified as the “firstborn from the dead.” It’s a position and title.

Here in verse 7 Jesus takes up the duty of declaring the Father’s decrees. Of course, as Christ’s body on the earth, we Christians are now commissioned to do the same. There is a *message* to be proclaimed. A *plan* to be explained. A God of mercy to be revealed to the rebels of the earth.

Psalm 2:8 - ⁸Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance and the ends of the earth your possession.

All of heaven and earth belongs to the Lord. Not just the land and the air and the water, but your life and your very breath, your future and your soul. It belongs to Him. And He has *asked* for you to become His. What a beautiful thing to learn. In John 17 we see our Lord, in love, asking for us, that we might be made one in Him and given access to the glories of His inheritance.

We see in this verse that despite all the plotting and rage in verses 1 and 2, the Lord *will* be the winner. *No one* can take what is rightfully His. And there’s nothing too broken for Him to restore. He alone can take the scroll and make right what we and the nations of the world have made wrong for these thousands of years of human history. But the earth, from one end to the other, will be redeemed, filled with His glory, and made new.

Seeing the wide lens of God’s plan here we must accept the truth that *only Christ* can solve the problems of our nation. Donald Trump can’t. Black Lives Matter can’t. Christ alone is able to save.

Psalm 2:9 - ⁹You will break them with an iron scepter; you will shatter them like pottery.”

One day the waiting will end and final judgment will arrive. Whether that’s for an individual unbeliever at their death, a nation at its fall or the whole world at the second coming, judgment *will* arrive and there will be no escape for those who will not own Jesus Christ as King.

As the Seattle police swept through CHAZ, they made about 30 arrests. There were, undoubtedly, some people who had committed crimes of one sort or another who dispersed, went back home and will not be held accountable in Washington court of law. But there is no flying under the radar of God’s judgment. Derek Kidner writes: “There is no refuge *from* Jesus, only *in* Jesus.”

But if a person will turn to Christ in surrender, if they will, by faith, repent and believe, then the Messiah will take their heart, stained and ruined with sin and wash it with His own blood, making it white as snow. When a person believes on Jesus, their guilt is removed. They are born again, not only into a new life, but into a new Kingdom. They become citizens under *His* throne, with all its privileges and protections, safe from the wrath to come. Are you safe?

Now, knowing what God has explained about the world and about His plan, what can a person or a nation do to be made right with God?

Psalm 2:10 - ¹⁰So now, kings, be wise; receive instruction, you judges of the earth.

After seeing all that these ragers have done - all their hate, all their treason, all their rebellion - God comes to them *with an offer of peace!*

He says, “Here’s what’s coming, but here’s hope. Here’s how to avoid what you so rightly deserve.” And what a comfort it is to know that *no one* is too far gone to be saved by the power of the Gospel. No prodigal, no politician, no criminal or cynic is outside His loving reach if they will but lay down their weapons and receive what is being offered.

In an amazing moment of irony we remember that, these kings, who were so full of rage and who demanded to be enthroned *instead* of the rightful King, these very individuals are offered the chance to rule and reign *along with* Jesus in His future Kingdom. What a God of amazing grace!

Psalm 2:11 - ¹¹ Serve the Lord with reverential awe and rejoice with trembling.

The Lord isn’t just looking for a ceasefire. He doesn’t just want them to submit politically, but personally.⁹ What God desires is a true love relationship with you. One in which we worship Him and serve Him, not begrudgingly but in celebration. A true, living faith which recognizes all that God is.

Psalm 2:12 - ¹² Pay homage to the Son or he will be angry and you will perish in your rebellion, for his anger may ignite at any moment. All who take refuge in him are happy.

We’re invited to pay homage to this King with a kiss. It’s an intimate, personal act of embrace. It’s the closeness He wants with each of His people. Though this verse speaks of God’s anger against sin and the required penalty for it, the Bible makes it clear that God does not *want* anyone to perish, but for all to come to repentance. That all would be made His by grace through faith.

Your sin deserves death, but the price has already been paid for it. Don’t pay it a second time. And don’t live a life *enslaved* to sin. A slave to the rage and the destruction it brings to you and your community. Instead, choose to bow your heart to the King of kings, Jesus the Messiah. You do not know when your final day is. Your rebellion may cost you everything at any moment. Instead, take refuge in Christ. Trust in Him. Believe Him. Tie yourself to Him in love and obedience, taking the way of the righteous and happy man in Psalm 1. *ALL* who take refuge in Him are happy.

During the Civil War the rebel yell was a source of pride and identity for many Confederate soldiers. In some cases, it was intimidating to the opponents on the battlefield. But it could do little to change the course of history. One article says it was simply “noise...[used] in a doomed attempt to overcome the Union’s overwhelming advantages in men and resources.”¹⁰

That didn’t stop some confederates from holding out, even after all had been decided. The sailors on the CSS *Shenandoah* sailed the Atlantic for 6 months after the war ended, refusing to come home. Many of their fellow fighters had laid down their weapons and been once again folded in to the United States. But the captain and her crew thought they wouldn’t receive amnesty or mercy for the war they had waged against the North, though there’s reason to believe they would have.¹¹ Instead, with Union ships in hot pursuit, the *Shenandoah* fled 9,000 nautical miles from home. Ultimately surrendering in Liverpool.

Psalm 2 is a song for rebels. One that shows us what the condition of our unregenerated hearts but also God’s profound mercy. This is the God who wants to take enemy conspirators, save them from themselves, make something beautiful with their lives, use them to benefit the world and then bring

⁹ JJ Stewart Perowne *Commentary On The Psalms*

¹⁰ https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Rebel_Yell

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CSS_Shenandoah#Surrender_of_CSS_Shenandoah

them into His own forever Kingdom and allow them to rule and reign there. When we talk about the power of Jesus and the goodness of God, that's what we're talking about. That kind of grace and ability and kindness. That level of transformation. We need God to have His way and His rule in our hearts, in our homes, and in the halls of our government.

Psalm 144:15b - Happy are the people whose God is the Lord.

Psalm 33:12a - ¹²Happy is the nation whose God is the Lord