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Hello and welcome to this episode of the St Andrew's Enfield podcast with me, Steve Griffiths. Now as I record this episode, it's July, 2019 and we're going through some really interesting times politically in the UK anyway because the Conservative Party is just about to elect their new leader who will, by default, become the new Prime Minister of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. And we've got two candidates. We've got Jeremy Hunt and we've got Boris Johnson and the nation, um, awaits the decision of 160,000 Conservative Party members to choose one of them as the new leader of their party who will then automatically become the Prime Minister as well. So they're really interesting days here in the UK. And I know that for many of you listening in other countries around the world, you too are facing interesting days to say the least in the political sense as well. And that the world is shifting and there's a seismic shift I think in world politics.

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And I'm sure wherever you are, your feeling something of that yourself. Now, this isn't a political podcast as you know, uh, but I do believe that it is impossible to divorce the Christian faith from politics. The Bible is an intensely political book. In the Old Testament, we read about the politics of Israel. We read about their kings and their judges. Uh, we read all about their relationships with other nations and tribes and the real battle in Israelite society to bring about social justice and care for the refugee and the widows and the orphans. And there's a whole lot written as well in the prophetic books about economic justice as well. And in the New Testament, um, that is, uh, full of politics as well. It's written against the backdrop of the Roman Empire. And so much of what Jesus did and said has to be read in the context of politics.

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Um, that is the backdrop of Jesus' own ministry. And of course his crucifixion was a political act by an oppressive regime. So there's hardly a page in the Bible that doesn't have some sort of political comment on it. And so as Christians, we must be politically engaged if we want to take our faith seriously. Now, most of us listening to this podcast, I guess, live in democratic countries and democracy is of course an incredible blessing to us and it's a deep privilege to be able to participate in the democratic process. It's more than a privilege I think. Um, I believe it's a deep rooted responsibility for each one of us to participate. In the 21st century, I think we're very quick to claim our democratic rights, but many people are far slower to acknowledge their democratic responsibilities. But I think that rights and responsibilities go hand in hand in a democracy and not least as Christians, um, we have a responsibility to participate by praying for our political leaders, praying for those who seek the honor of public office regardless of their political party color, if you like.

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Um, and it's our responsibility to pray for our political leaders that I want to think about in this episode of the podcast. And to do that, I want to focus on, a really great Psalm in the Bible, Psalm 2. Um, because this is a portion of scripture that speaks profoundly, I think, into our contemporary context because quite simply it is about politics. It's about the state of the nations and

the standing of the nations before God. So it's very timely for us to think about Psalm 2 given the political turmoil that we see all around us and around the globe. Perhaps, um, more than ever. It's our duty as Christians to pray for our political leaders as they, um, attempt to rationalize what's gone on before and create structures for societies, uh, that are sustainable into the future. There was a, uh, a British Prime Minister in the 19th century called, uh, Lord Melbourne. And, uh, he once said this, he said, "Things have come to a pretty pass when religion is allowed to invade public life". Well, I hope that, uh, none of us think like that because there is no division between public life and faith. Uh, as Christians, our history is testament to the fact that prayer and action must play a part in the wellbeing of our nation. So let's have a look at Psalm 2 and let's see what we can learn from it about praying for our political leaders.

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the sense of, um, disillusionment and betrayal, which pervades many societies when it comes to reflecting on the political process. And I have to be up front here and say quite clearly really that I don't buy into the lie, which is peddled by so many in the media that politicians can't be trusted, that they're all in it for personal gain and that they're all corrupt. Um, I don't buy into the lie, um, that all politicians are the same, that all political parties are the same and that we should somehow, um, distrust every motive as if they're all tarnished by greed and arrogance. I think that that is a lie. I think it's a lie perpetuated to sell newspapers and to keep us tuned into the TV channels. I think most politicians are actually really hardworking. I think they're honest. Um, and on the whole people of integrity trying to make a difference for their local communities, uh, often against all the odds really.

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So I think that most politicians are to be respected and applauded, um, and not treated as if they're some sort of lower life form. And I think that many people in the media should really be ashamed of the way in which they undermine, um, the democratic spirit by their method of reporting and, uh, some of the stories that they focus on. But, um, that being said, it's true that the political world is, uh, well it's no utopia, is it? And there are many who do feel disillusioned with politics. Um, but if it's any comfort, then feeling disillusioned with politics is not a new phenomenon. Uh, when we turn to Psalm 2, we look at verses one to three and it says this, it says, "Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and his anointed saying let us burst their bonds asunder and cast their cords from us?"

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And what's being expressed here, um, I think is a real disillusionment with political leaders, a real sense of disillusionment with morality in society. A sense that everything is going wrong, that things aren't how they used to be. And in these first three verses of Psalm 2, um, the Psalmist sets out three attitudes I think, that are prevalent in society, um, that are mirrored in our own world as well. Firstly, uh, the Psalmist talks about arrogance. In verse one, uh, he writes "Why do the nations conspire?" And of course, that's not a comment on a

rebellion against unjust rulers or the overthrow of cruel dictatorships, but it's a comment on rebellion against morality and the ways of God. It's, um, uh, plotting and planning and, uh, looking after Number One that is so wrong. And the Psalmist interprets this as rebellion against God. And in verse two, he says that "The rulers plot together against the Lord".

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And again, it's a really depressing picture of earthly powers coming together at the expense of the needs of the poor and the marginalized, um, at the expense of the concerns of God. And it's not as if those leaders, uh, can even claim ignorance for their defiant behavior. Because in verse three, it's made clear that they're actually really aware of God's expectations, but they're so deluded that they think they can defy God and get away with it. They say, ah, in verse 3 "Let us burst God's bonds asunder and cast his cords from us". So here is an arrogance, a disobedience, a self-delusion, um, that has so often been at the heart of the pursuit of political power throughout the centuries. And it's very evident of course in our day as well. Here the Psalmist is, um, describing godless nations that pay lip service to faith, but whose actions reveal pride and arrogance, nations that are governed by selfish desires and selfish pursuit.

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But then, um, we, we get a very different perspective on the same situation. In the next three verses we get a birds eye view or a better still, a God's eye view, uh, because rather than centering on the attitudes of the people, um, in the next part of the Psalm we're then transported to heaven to see how God views the situation. And here things are very different. In verse four, it says, "He who sits in the heavens laughs. The Lord has them in derision". It's like it doesn't matter what the politicians dream up, it doesn't matter how much the people plot and plan, it doesn't matter how much, uh, all these powerful people stamp their feet and turn their backs on God because God, um, laughs at our pathetic and rather, um, childish attempts towards independence because ultimately, um, he is God and we are his creatures. And then we get God's awesome response. In verse five, it says, "Then he will speak to them in his wrath and terrify them in his fury". Um, none of us can hide from the anger of God when we choose to disobey him because ultimately, uh, whether we like it or not, he's King and Lord of all. And then he says in verse six, "I've set my king on Zion, my holy hill". And here of course, is where we come to the crux of the matter. Who is this king who has God set on his holy hill?

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So who is this king whom God has set on his holy hill? Who is the ruler over all the politicians of the earth? Well, of course it's none other than Jesus Christ. And it's his kingship, his claim to be Lord, uh, which demands obedience from us. Um, often we hear people say that Christianity is a list of do's and don'ts, a set of rules to be obeyed. But our call to obedience doesn't come from the 10 Commandments. We don't obey God by adhering to the laws written in the Bible. We obey God, uh, simply because we have a relationship with Jesus. And part of that relationship means to accept his Lordship, uh, in our lives. So we try to live our lives according to his teaching, to his standards, simply because he is

our Lord. Uh, Christian discipleship isn't just an academic exercise based on 360 laws written over 4,000 years ago.

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It's based on a, a living and a lively relationship, which each one of us can enjoy with Jesus today. But what is it about Jesus that gives him the authority and the power to claim lordship in our lives and over this world? What gives Jesus the right to claim Lordship over the nations? Why should we as individuals and as a nation, look to Jesus for a sense of guidance and discipline? Well, the answer comes in verses seven to nine. Firstly, that Jesus' authority rests fundamentally in his own relationship with God. In verse seven, uh, the prophetic words of Christ are foretold, it says this, "I will tell of the decree of the Lord. He said to me, you are my son. Today I have begotten you". Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the words from this Psalm were used again at the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan.

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And at that time the Gospel writers tell us that a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son with whom I'm well pleased. Listen to him". And ultimately it's in his relationship with God as his Son, that Jesus' authority over us, um, becomes manifest because, um, just like most children, Jesus is the heir to the riches of the Father. God says to his Son in verse 8 of this Psalm, he says, "Ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth, your possession." So we are the possession of Christ. He owns us. We are his, um, and this country where I live, and the country where you live, the world in which we live is actually the possession of Christ. And as our owner, he has the ultimate right to be our Lord and our King and to demand obedience from us.

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And not only obedience. We need to be clear on that as well, that Christ has the right to exercise judgment on us when we disobey. Verse 9, it says, "You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel". Now, I'm not really one of those preachers who's into hell fire and damnation, uh, but we must never manufacture an idol for a God who has no passion and power and sense of justice. The truth in Scripture and in this Psalm is that God will come in judgment if we continue to disobey him. So this Psalm then, um, I know we've gone quite round the houses really, uh, in this episode, uh, in some ways, but this Psalm, uh, does paint a vivid picture of a nation, uh, world lost in its own godlessness, um, a vivid picture of a powerful God who overcomes the petty rebellions of humanity, and a vivid picture of Christ, the Son of God who is Lord over all.

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Um, and so this Psalm then brings us to the point of saying, "Well, if that's how the nations are, if that's how the world is, if that's the claim that Christ has over us, then surely as Christians, we have a responsibility then to work for and to pray for change in our world". And to a large extent, I think this Psalm leads us to the conclusion that we begin to do that by praying for our leaders, praying for our political leaders, and Psalm 2 gives us three ways in which we should be praying for our political leaders.

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And the first thing that this Psalm says about how we should pray for our political leaders, is that our leaders will develop wisdom. In verse 10, it says, "Now, therefore O kings be wise. Be warned, O rulers of the earth". Um, it's not an easy task to have great power and influence in politics. The job is stressful. Uh, the temptations are many and uh, they're really big temptations as well. And we need to pray that our leaders can be wise in how they handle themselves in their leadership positions. And then secondly, this Psalm reminds us that we need to pray that our leaders, uh, will have purity. In verse 11, it says, "Serve the Lord with fear". And our prayer is that the leaders of the nations, our political leaders will recognize, um, that in serving us, they're actually serving God. And finally, uh, we need to pray that our leaders will respond to God in a personal way.

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In verse 12, it says, "Happy are all those who take refuge in him". Uh, if our leaders, if our political leaders developed devout and holy lives, can you imagine how the politics of this world would be transformed? But as with all things, transformation in society doesn't really begin with others. It begins with you and me. It begins with our responsibility, uh, to pray for those in political authority. It all starts with you and I, um, kind of getting down on our knees and praying for our leaders. Uh, if we want a better world, then we need to work for it and we also need to pray for it. If we want, um, better politicians making wiser decisions, then yes, we need to get engaged politically, but we also need to pray for them. And I just want to, um, uh, finish this podcast with, um, an extract from a woman's diary.

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Um, something she wrote after attending a church meeting. And, uh, in this meeting they were discussing, uh, all the grave injustices in society. They were talking about how there's a, a desperate need for change in the world. Um, and, um, there was a desperate need to see God at work, uh, in the nations. Um, and she wrote this entry in a diary as a prayer and it goes like this: "Dear God, your request that we act on injustice was discussed at our recent church meeting. Here are the results. There were 158 members in our church, but 45 said that they were too old for that sort of thing. That leaves 113 but 36 said they do enough for church already. That leaves 77. But 42 said they don't like to make a fuss. That leaves 35, but 22 are sure that somebody else could do it better. That leaves just 13, but 12 say they've already done their bit. So that leaves me. Where do I start? "

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Well, I hope that you found this a useful episode and that together we can, um, commit ourselves to praying for our political leaders; that they would grow in wisdom and faith and deepen their understanding that in serving the people they are first and foremost, uh, to serve God. If you want to carry on this conversation with me, then please do email me, [steve.griffiths@london.anglican.org](mailto:steve.griffiths@london.anglican.org). Uh, check out our website [standrewsenfield.com](http://standrewsenfield.com) and our Facebook page St Andrew's Enfield. Um, please subscribe to these podcasts, let other people know about them as well. And, uh, wherever you are today, I hope that you have a really good day and that you will be assured of God's blessing on your life. And don't forget to pray - pray for your

political leaders today. And together, uh, let's work towards, um, ushering in God's kingdom, both in the church and in the wider world. So have a great day.

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Bye.