

Reasons for Singing

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Preacher: Terry McCutcheon

[0 : 0 0] Well, turn with me in your Bibles then to Psalm number 98. If you have one of the church visitor's Bibles, I think it's page 500. Otherwise, you'll find it in the book of Psalms, near the middle of your Bibles.

Psalm number 98. A Psalm.

O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things. His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him.

The Lord has made known his salvation. He has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. He has remembered his steadfast love, his covenant love and faithfulness to the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

[1 : 0 6] Break forth into joyous song and sing praises. Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with the lyre and with the sound of the melody. With trumpets and the sound of the horn.

Make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord. Let the sea roar and all that fills it. The world and those who dwell in it.

Let the rivers clap their hands. Let the hills sing for joy together before the Lord. For he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness.

And the peoples with equity. Amen. May God bless to us his word.

I invite you to take your Bibles and to turn with me again to Psalm 98, which you will find in page 500 of the Pew Bible.

[2 : 1 0] Psalm 98. And as you do so, let me say a word of prayer.

Father, what we have not, give us. What we know not, teach us. And what we are not, we ask that you would make us.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Sing to the Lord a new song. Do you feel like singing? Well, if we're honest, there are a lot of times, even as Christians, when we don't feel like singing.

But this psalm gives us reasons to sing. This psalm calls everyone and everything to rejoice. To rejoice.

To rejoice. Because of what God has done in the past. And because of what God will do in the future. The psalm breaks into three. Verses one to three.

[3 : 1 5] God's people are called to sing to God a song of praise. A song of praise because God is Savior. In verses four to six. All people on earth are called to join in this song.

Because God is king. And in verses seven to nine. The whole creation is called to join in also. Because God is judge. Well, what is the reason for all this rejoicing?

What is the context for this rejoicing taking place? Well, Bob Fyre has just finished his series on Jeremiah. And one of the main things Jeremiah preached to the nation of Israel.

Was of their coming judgment. The judgment of God. Because of their rebellion. Which would result in the nation being defeated. And dispersed. And carried off into exile into Babylon.

Well, this prophecy has come to pass. The land was lost. Liberty was lost. Property was lost. Families were broken up. Family members carried off into exile.

[4 : 26] It was a dark, depressing, and discouraging time for the nation of Israel. But after 50 years or so. News has come that the Babylonian empire has fallen.

And all the exiles can go home. Home to their own lands. I'm sure you can imagine that this was overwhelming news. Overwhelming news. Overwhelming news that would have been met with great rejoicing.

Great rejoicing. We're going home. Because the Lord has redeemed Jerusalem. And his people are going home. So this psalm is the song that the exiles sang as they returned home to Israel.

So firstly in verses 1 to 3. We have God's people are called to sing to God. A song of praise. Because God is the saviour.

These verses are a call. A call for Israel to sing to God as their saviour. Look with me at verse 1. Oh sing to the Lord a new song.

[5 : 27] So this is a new response to what God has done. So what has God done? Well if you look through verses 1 to 3. You will see a word repeated. Can you see it?

The word is salvation. It's there three times in three verses. God has saved and redeemed his people from exile in Babylon. And he is bringing them home.

And how is it that this return has come about? Well look with me again at verses 1 to 3. It's entirely a work of God. He has done marvellous things.

His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The Lord has made his salvation known. He has revealed his righteousness.

He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness. The ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. So it is clear from these verses that this is a work of God.

[6 : 27] The return from exile was prompted, yes, by the fall of the Babylonian Empire. And by Cyrus, the new reigning Persian king allowing the exiles to return home.

But behind these events lie God's right hand. His holy arm. Single handedly working on behalf and for the good of his people.

So you see, Yahweh, the God of Israel, is also the Lord of human history. And he saves his people by acting in sovereign power over all the nations of the earth.

Now why has he done this? Why would he do this? Is it because Israel deserves to be redeemed from exile? Do they deserve his salvation? Well, no, they don't.

All they deserved for their persistent rebellion from the Lord and his word was his wrath and his judgment. He has saved them, not because they deserve to be saved, but because he wants to.

[7 : 32] Because he has chosen to. And in order also that he would reveal his righteousness to the watching world. Look at verse 2. The Lord has made known his salvation.

He has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. You see, friends, Israel being in exile, it was an absolute disgrace.

God's people torn from the land, conquered by the pagan empire of Babylon. You can imagine what the surrounding nations were saying at the time. No much he a God, is he?

No much he a God, if he allows this to happen to his people. And it doesn't say much for all the promises that he made. Promised to make for himself a people. And to give them a land.

But the return from the exile is a revelation of God's righteousness. Of his righteousness to a watching world. That he really is the holy God. And that he really is faithful to his promises.

[8 : 34] And to his people. Verse 3. He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. Well, friends, that's the Old Testament context of this psalm.

But remember this psalm is part of the Old Testament and must be interpreted by the New. And when we turn in our Bibles to the New Testament and to Luke's gospel. We find in chapter 1 and in chapter 2.

Mary's song, the Magnificat. And the words of old Simeon. When the Lord Jesus Christ was brought to the temple. And the words of Mary and the words of Simeon. Are very similar to words of Psalm 98.

In verse 31 of chapter 1 of Luke. Mary is told by the angel. That she was to be the mother of the long promised Messiah. Her response is strikingly similar to verse 3 of Psalm 98.

Keep your eye on verse 3 of Psalm 98. And I will read Mary's response in Luke. Or part of Mary's response in Luke. He has helped his servant Israel. In remembrance of his mercy.

[9 : 42] As he spoke to her fathers. To Abraham. And to his offspring. Forevermore. And keeping your eyes in verse 3. Let me read some of the words spoken by old Simeon.

Lord. Now you are letting your servant depart in peace. According to your word. For my eyes have seen your salvation. That you have prepared in the presence of all peoples.

A light of revelation to the Gentiles. And for glory to your people Israel. Do you see the similarity? Do you see what both Mary and Simeon are saying?

They are both saying that in the birth of the Messiah. Mary's son Jesus. God is really doing something very similar. To the return from exile. He has remembered his promises.

And he has once again. Came to help Israel. And also that in the birth of Jesus Christ. That the nations have seen salvation.

[10 : 44] And this time. Not salvation. Not rescue from Babylon back to the land. But in a far far greater salvation that Jesus Christ will bring.

A salvation. A rescue. From sin. And its penalty. Satan and his bondage. And death. And its permanence. And this salvation.

This rescue. Will be brought about through the death. And resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's exactly as Isaac Watts writes in the great Christmas Carol.

Which is based in Psalm 98. Joy to the world. The Lord has come. Not just return from exile. But God himself coming. Coming to his people to bring to an end.

A far far greater exile. Bringing to an end. The exile of mankind from God. And so Israel are called. Called to sing a song.

[11 : 42] A song of great joy. Because the exile has ended. Because God has done marvelous things. He has come. To save his people. But secondly in verses 4 to 6.

All people on earth are called. To join in with this song. They are called to worship Israel's God as king. Make a joyful noise to the Lord.

All the earth. Break forth into joyous song. And sing praises. Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre. With the lyre. And the sound of melody.

With trumpets and the sound of the horn. Make a joyful noise before the king. The Lord. In these verses. All the nations that surround Israel.

Are called to rejoice. In the celebrating. Because they have witnessed firsthand. What the Lord has done for Israel. And so they are to acknowledge the Lord as king.

[12 : 42] Why? Well because the mighty deliverance. That he has brought about for his people. Is a sign that he has sovereign rule. And sovereign power. Over all the affairs of men.

Over all the affairs of all nations. Great and small. And he is therefore to be worshipped. With joyful noise. With praises being sung. With music on the lyre.

The trumpet. And the horn. And these directions that the psalmist gives here. Are the directions for music. And a coronation. In 1 Kings chapter 1.

During the coronation of Solomon. When Zadok the priest anointed Solomon king. They blew the trumpets. And all the people shouted and rejoiced. Because God's king was being enfroned.

And so too here. The reign of God the king is. Is too to be celebrated. With music. And shouts. And singing. And joyful noise.

[13 : 39] Now the Lord's people are used to that idea aren't they? Singing and praising God. But it's a tall order. It's an alien concept for the surrounding nations isn't it? For them to be called to come and worship and rejoice.

Because Israel's king is being enfroned. All the nations that had returned from exile. Well they had their own gods. Why should they worship Israel's God?

Why is he better than any other God? And I mean. Israel isn't that very big. We think that we. Scotland are a small country. Well you could fit Israel almost four times into the area of Scotland.

And if the size of Israel isn't that impressive. Neither is the amount of people that returned from exile. And an estimated 40,000. You've got to be having a laugh.

You must be joking. Is this really the marvellous things that God has done? Is this seriously? The display of the power of his right hand? His holy arm?

[14 : 38] Is this really the show that he has put on to all the watching nations of the earth? Well is it? Well yes. It is. But you can only see it with the eyes of faith.

The surrounding nations I am sure but have laughed. At the absurdity of this call. This command to sing and rejoice. And worship the God of Israel's king. And if you're here this evening.

And you're a Christian. Then you'll know this reaction well. Every year at Christmas we sing. Joy to the world. The Lord has come. Let earth receive her king.

Let every heart prepare him room. And how do people in the street react when we sing that to them every Christmas? They take her flyers about the Christmas services.

And they throw them down in the street. They're more interested in going into the shops and buying gifts for family members and friends. And don't give a second thought to the gift of his son that God has sent for them.

[15 : 43] Are our family gatherings which can be excruciantly painful at Christmas? In fact they can be excruciantly painful at any time of the year. Our family gatherings can be excruciantly painful at Christmas.

Even in Christian families. But more so if you're from a non-Christian family. I didn't grow up in a Christian home. And in our family gatherings at Christmas.

The Lord Jesus Christ is given the same welcome. As the night he came into the world. No room at the inn. No room for you Jesus. Our families and friends are more interested in the food than the table.

What's on the television. Showing off their gifts to each other. Or getting drunk. And in all these ways. They betray what they really think of God's mighty acts.

By the way they despise the birth of God's son the king. And that may be your experience every Christmas. Year after year after year. Having to endure that which you should be enjoying.

[16 : 47] Because you have to endure it with a godless family. It's very painful isn't it? You knowing that God and Christ. Incomprehensibly becoming man. In the incarnation.

The wonder. The mystery of it all. And everybody round about you. Despising the thing. But you see friends. It doesn't matter.

If the surrounding nations don't acknowledge Israel's God as king. And whether our loved ones acknowledge the baby in the manger as Lord. Whether they do or they don't. He still is. He still is the Lord.

He still is the king. He is the Lord. The king. Over all nations. Over all peoples. And his actions on behalf of Israel prove it.

What other God could have brought them from Babylon. And brought his people back to the land. And what other God could humble themselves. To be born as a baby. To live as a man.

[17 : 45] And to die. Bearing the punishment for the sins of the world. He is the savior king. And all of his actions on behalf of his people. All of his actions.

In Old Testament times. And in New Testament times. Prove it to be so. And so the psalmist is right to call everybody. Everybody. Everywhere.

To get up on their feet. And acknowledge this fact. Verse 4. Make a joyful noise to the Lord. All the earth. Break forth into joyous song. And sing praises.

All the earth. Not just Israel. But everybody. Again Isaac Watts. Joy to the world. The savior reigns. Let men their songs employ.

In other words. Everybody on earth. Everybody without exception. Is to sing to the savior king. Well what if the nations refuse to sing?

[18 : 40] What if you refuse to sing? Well you. And the nations. Will find out that this will be a terrible loss to you. A terrible loss that will have eternal significance.

As verses 7 to 9 make plain. Here the call is not to Israel. Nor is it to all the nations. All the people on earth. But no this time. It's to all of creation.

The whole of nature. So thirdly and finally. We have in verses 7 to 9. The whole creation is called to join in also. Because God is judge. Let the sea roar.

And all that fills it. The world and those who dwell in it. Let the rivers clap their hands. Let the hills sing for joy together before the Lord.

For he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness. And the peoples with equity. All of creation is called to join in with this song of praise.

[19 : 48] The seas roar as waves crash together. Whales and dolphins singing. Seabirds calling. The sea and everything in it responds. And so do all the creatures of the earth.

The roar of the lion and the tiger. The trumpet of elephants. The barking of dogs. The chorus of frogs. The clucking of Edward Lobb's chickens. The shouts.

The songs. The praises of men. Rivers and streams clap their hands. The hills sing for joy as the wind rushes through them and between them. The whole of creation joined in in this wall of universal noise.

Making up a chorus of praise to God. But what are they singing about? What is the basis of this universal song? Well, they are singing about the reign of the Savior King.

Again, Isaac Watts. Joy to the earth. The Savior reigns. Let men their songs employ. While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains repeat the sounding joy.

[20 : 57] But there is a difference in nature's song. Do you see it? It's there in verse 9. Singing not about past salvation. But of coming judgment.

Verse 9. For he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness. And the peoples with equity. Friends, do you get what the psalmist is saying?

He is saying that the nation of Israel, having been exiled to Babylon, now returning to the land. And remember, not all Israelites. Only some 40,000 are returning to the land. A land, remember, that is only a quarter the size of Scotland.

And that because of this salvation for these people, the entire creation rejoices. Because this is a sign that God is coming as judge of the earth.

Surely the psalmist is off his head, you might say. Why is the return of these people a sign that God is coming in judgment? Well, because in this act of rescuing his chosen people, Israel from exile and Babylon, just as he promised, God has shown his righteousness.

[22 : 03] And he has shown that he and nobody else is the sovereign ruler of history. And so one day, one day he will come as judge. And to establish his rule over the whole earth.

And defeat all his enemies. For he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness. And the peoples with equity.

So it is absolutely clear. When he comes, all those who have ignored him. All those who have scoffed at his son. All those who have refused to accept his son as Lord.

And the salvation he has provided. All those will be judged with absolute equity. Absolute fairness. It's very sobering, isn't it?

But why should this coming judgment give the whole of creation reason to sing for joy? Well, because ever since the fall, all of nature has been under God's curse.

[23 : 07] And has been groaning under this curse. As the apostle Paul writes in Romans chapter 8. For the creation waits with eager longing. For the revealing of the sons of God.

For the creation was subjected to futility. Not willingly. Not willingly. But because of him who subjected it. In hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption.

And obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together. In the pains of childbirth. Until now.

The whole creation has been groaning. Groaning to be set free from its bondage to corruption. To be set free from subject to futility. The whole creation has been groaning.

And then the whole creation hears the good news. That God has rescued his people from exile. And the creation knows that God must soon be coming to rule forever.

[24 : 06] And so it rejoices. And sings the song of joy. At the prospect of the soon coming new heaven and new earth. Free from futility.

Free from bondage. Free from exploitation. Free from decay, death and decomposition. Again Isaac Watts. No more let sins and sorrows grow.

Nor thorns infest the ground. He comes to make his blessings flow. For as the curse is found. So the Lord's rescue of his people from exile.

Is a very clear sign that he is coming one day as judge. Because his rescue of his people from exile. Is a clear sign. That he is the ruler of the whole universe.

But the coming of God as a baby in a manger. Is an even greater and clearer sign. That judgment is imminent. Two thousand years is a long time to us.

[25 : 04] But it's only a couple of days to God. So friends. Let the certain knowledge of these two great events in God's timetable. Give us great reason to sing and rejoice.

To rejoice in his past salvation for his people from exile. But far more importantly. In the coming of Jesus Christ. And the salvation that he brings.

From sin, death and hell. And also coming in the future judgment. Because he came as saviour. He will also come as judge. And when he does.

He will establish his kingdom. Of righteous rule forever. And will destroy all his opposition. He rules the world. With truth and grace.

And makes the nations prove. The glories of his righteousness. The wonders of his love. The wonders of his love. And past salvation.

[26 : 03] And the glories of his righteousness. That will be shown in coming judgment. Yes he is the righteous ruler. Who will come again as judge. But he is also the loving saviour.

Who has made it clear. That before he comes as judge. Salvation is possible. So there it is friends. Psalm 98.

Well what should be your response to this psalm? Well. You should sing to the Lord a new song. If you are part of Israel.

Part of God's people. The church. Rejoice in the salvation he has given you. But what if you are not yet a Christian? Well if you are not yet a Christian.

You are part of the nations. And you must join the song as well. And you must realise. That this salvation is for you. You as well. And you need to come.

[26 : 58] And put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a way back to God. From the dark paths of sin. There is a door. That is open. That you may go in.

And at Calvary's cross. Well. That's where you begin. When you come. As a sinner. To Jesus. And we are also to realise.

That the whole creation. Joins in with this great song. Because these events of past salvation. And coming judgment. Are of universal significance. You may not think that this salvation is that important.

But this psalm makes it very clear. And tells us. That it is. The return from exile was very important. And a cause of great joy. And great rejoicing.

How much more. The coming of Jesus Christ. And the return. From sin. Death. And hell. I think these are great reasons to sing.

[28 : 01] Don't you? Father. We thank you. That you have indeed brought joy to the world. And the marvellous things that you have done.

And the birth of your son. The Lord Jesus Christ. And his death. His burial. His resurrection. His ascension. And his soon coming again in judgment.

Thank you that you have in these things. Given us great reasons to sing. To sing and praise Jesus Christ. As our saviour. As our king. And as our judge.

So fill us with the truth of these things. Help us to be lost in the wonder. And the awe of it all. And as we go into this week. And every other week.

Until you return. Or call us home. May these be the basis. Of our reasons to sing. We ask all these things. In Jesus name. Amen.