

## 2. Let the earth rejoice

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Date: 13 June 2012

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     So let's pray together. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Let the earth hear his voice. Father, we are so grateful that in your wonderful grace you have come right down to us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- One with you who became one of us and is one of us still. You are great and we are small. You are wise and we are foolish.
- You are eternal and we are mortal. You are holy and we are sinful. And yet you have given us the privilege of coming into your presence, welcoming us, adopting us as your sons and daughters and making us fit to stand before you.
- And so we pray, Father, in these moments as we come to put ourselves under your word, that you will speak to us. Speak to us powerfully. Speak to us the things we need to hear.
- Speak to us from those timeless words written once to people far away, both in time and in space, with a language different from ours.
- [ 1 : 1 8 ]     And yet words which come to us as words from the eternal God, words from you and about you, words which will change us. And as we rejoice in the sense of your love and of your presence, we don't want to forget the world around us of which we are part.
- This is not just a world of love and joy and beauty. It is a world of sin, a world under the curse, a world of sorrow. And we thank you that in your word there is a gospel that will meet through your riches in Christ Jesus.
- Our joys and our sorrows, transforming the one and healing the other. And so we come to you now, laying ourselves open to what you have to say to us and asking that you will indeed bless us.
- In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Now our psalm today is Psalm 97 on the Visitor's Bible. It's on page 499.
- Second of our Praise Psalms, which I've given the general heading of praising his name. Psalm 97. The Lord reigns.
- [ 2 : 3 6 ]     Let the earth rejoice. Let the many coastlands be glad. Clouds and thick darkness are all around him. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.
- Fire goes before him and burns up his adversities all around. His lightnings light up the world. The earth sees and trembles.
- The mountains melt like wax before the Lord. Before the Lord of all the earth. The heavens proclaim his righteousness. And all the peoples see his glory.
- All worshippers of images are put to shame. Who make their boast in worthless idols. Worship him. All you gods. Zion hears and is glad.
- And the daughters of Judah rejoice. Because of your judgments, O Lord. For you, O Lord, are most high over all the earth. You are exalted far above all gods.
- [ 3 : 4 1 ]     O you who love the Lord. Hate evil. He preserves the lives of his saints. He delivers them from the hand of the wicked. Light is sown for the righteous.

And joy for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous. And give thanks to his holy name.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord. May he bless it to our hearts and to our minds. Whatever you read in your newspapers or listened to on your television news this morning, I'm sure you did not see or hear the phrase, The Lord reigns.

The kind of things I heard this morning were continuing disturbance in Syria, further repression, further violence, further bloodshed.

Continuing slaughter in Afghanistan. Continuing crisis in the euro. And some of you at least will be saddened at rangers in liquidation.

[ 4 : 52 ] I'm a Newcastle supporter, so it doesn't really matter. Anyway, what does the psalmist mean? What can he mean when he proclaims triumphantly and without any hesitation, The Lord reigns.

The Lord has become king. This is a kind of coronation shout. When Solomon became king, having put down all the opposition, an exactly similar phrase was used.

Solomon reigns. Solomon has become king. So you see, it's a cry of loyalty. A statement of faith. Rather like the saying, Jesus is Lord.

Now if we are saying that with deep conviction, And not just because it's a nice thing in a chorus, Then that is also a statement of faith. So let's look at this psalm for a few moments And see how the psalmist justifies this.

How he develops this. This is God who is the conqueror. This is the God who can handle the giant evils of the world. He is coming.

[ 6 : 00 ] The next psalm, particularly Psalm 98, Is going to talk about the Lord coming to judge the earth. And this of course points to the ultimate coming, The coming of the king, the Lord Jesus Christ, Which you read about in Revelation 1.

See, he is coming with clouds, And every eye will look on him. So it's a psalm of confidence about the future, Which gives us confidence in the present.

It really develops, I think, in three particular stanzas. It's an interesting psalm in many ways. It reminds me of the guy who read Shakespeare for the first time, And said, Shakespeare is full of quotations.

Well, when you read this psalm, You might well think it's full of quotations as well, Because it draws so heavily on the experience, And on the writings of earlier Israel.

And the first part, verses 1 to 5, The psalmist is saying, He is the only one who reigns. But he's not saying this as an expression of an opinion, He's saying this as a reality.

[ 7 : 07 ] And he's saying further, This is something which the earth needs to know. This is not just something for God's people. Let the many coastlands, This is a word you get in the later parts of the Old Testament, Coastlands or islands, The sense of the geographical horizon spreading out beyond the area we call the Middle East, Into the Mediterranean, Into the new powers of Greece and Rome, Get it in Isaiah, Get it in Daniel, This sense, This gospel is a universal gospel.

We have a gospel to proclaim. Good news for all throughout the earth. Nothing nationalistic, Nothing parochial, Nothing limited about the gospel.

So, He's saying, He is the only one who reigns, Because he is the universal king. Israel was surrounded by gods, But they were essentially godlets.

They essentially were localized. He had gods of the mountains, Gods of the plains, Gods of the sea, And so on. But Yahweh, The Lord, Is not a local godlet.

He is the god of gods, And the king of kings. And you'll notice that what the psalmist is doing here, Is he is playing again old tunes, That come earlier in the Bible, Clouds, Thick darkness, Righteousness, And justice.

[ 8 : 35 ] This is recalling the story of God's people at Mount Sinai, Recalling the time when God came down in flames, Fire goes before him, Burns up his adversities all around, His lightnings light up the world, The earth sees and trembles.

So, This god is the universal god, The lord of history, These big themes that run through the Old Testament. He made everything, He is in everything.

You want theological words, And I cannot imagine why you would, But anyway, Let me give them. He is the god of creation, He is the god of providence. And that is an astonishing thought.

When I was a child, I used to sing, Some of you will remember this from your childhood, God who made the earth, The air, The sky, The sea, Who gave the light its birth, Careth for me.

That is astounding, That is astonishing. If this were a congregation in Uganda, You would all be saying, Preach it again, Brother, Say it again. Most of us are British, We are inhibited, And we don't behave that way.

[ 9 : 43 ] But doesn't it just throw you a little, That this god, Who made the earth, The air, The sky, The sea, God of history, Comes right down to us.

That does not mean, Of course, He is a domesticated god. Aslan, Remember, Is not a tame lion. Verse 3, The earth sees, And trembles.

The earth trembles, When God is present. You see, We need a big god, To deal with the gigantic problems. We need a god, Who made the heavens, And the earth, The god who is still involved in them.

We need a god, Who can deal with the problems, Of the nations. A god, Who can handle the euro crisis. A god, Who can sort out, The problems in Syria. God can sort out, The gigantic problems, In your life, And in my life.

And if we have a tame, Domesticated god, One of the problems is, We soon become bored with him, Because he is so like us. And we need someone, Greater than us, As well as someone, Who is one of us.

[ 10 : 48 ] The earth sees, And trembles, The mountains melt like wax, Before the lord. This sense of awe, And reverence. This sense, This is the god, Whom we fall down before.

Come, Let us worship, And fall down, On our faces, Before him. You see, There is mystery, About this god, As well.

This god, Is not someone, We can put, In a box. That leads on, To the second sense, Of verses six to nine, He is the only one, Who reigns.

Secondly, He is the only one, To be worshipped, The heavens proclaim, His righteousness, All the people, See his glory. In what sense, Do the heavens, Proclaim his righteousness?

In what sense, Does creation praise him? Later on, In the Psalms, And some of the last Psalms, We find that, Snow and wind, Fire and hail, Mountains and all hills, Beasts and all livestock, Are called upon, To praise this god, Now, C.S. Lewis says, The first way, That creation praises god, Is by being creation, The seas, The skies, Praise god, By proclaiming his glory, The heavens declare, The glory of god, And the skies, Proclaim his handiwork, And that's why, In verse seven, The psalmist says, All worshippers of images, Are put to shame, Who make their boast, In worthless idols, Worship him, All you gods, Because these gods, Are human creation, Remember at the very heart, Of Israel's faith, Was this great assertion, My help, Is in the name, Of the lord,

[ 12 : 37 ] Who made, Heaven and earth, Now it's not just, A theoretical idea, Is it? If he made, Heaven and earth, There is nothing, In heaven and earth, That can stand against him, There is nothing, That can ultimately, Frustrate his will, It also means, There is no one else, To whom, I owe, Worship, The heavens proclaim, His righteousness, All who see him, And the people see his glory, But he also is to be praised, Because of his glory, And his judgments, Verse eight, Zion hears, And is glad, And the daughters of Judah rejoice, Zion hears, We don't know, When this psalm was written, But the phrase, The daughters of Judah rejoice, Zion hears, And is glad, It may be, That this psalm, Like psalms 46 and 48, The background of them, May be the time, When the lord rescued, The city of Jerusalem, From the Assyrians, And from that terrible devastation, We don't know,

But it may, It may be that, And that story, Illustrates in time and space, The reality of who God is, For you, Who you, O Lord, Are most high, Over all the earth, You are exalted, Far above all gods, None of us, Make images, And bow down before them, Of course, So there's nothing to do with us at all, Does it?

But we know, It has everything to do with us, Don't we? The natural condition, Of the human heart, Is idolatry, Isn't it? To worship things, To trust things, Other than God, Ultimately to trust ourselves, That's the sin, At the very beginning of the Bible, You will be like God, If we don't worship, The true God, Then we're going to worship, Other gods, And ultimately, We're going to worship, Ourselves, So he is the only one, To be worshipped, And worship, Of course, Means, Means the whole of our lives, If you, Where do you worship?

Now, If many of us were asked that question, We would name a particular building, I worship in St. George's Tron, Or I worship in much Wittering on the Marsh, Parish Church, Or wherever it happens to be, The true answer to that question, Is in Romans 12, Isn't it?

Wherever my body happens to be, Present your bodies, Which is your reasonable worship, Of course, We meet with God's people, To praise him, And to listen to his word, But worship of our hearts and lives, Is a daily, Hourly thing, The only, The only king, The only one, Who is to be worshipped, In verses 10 to 12, The only one, Who deserves our allegiance, Oh you, Who love the Lord, Hate evil, There are two aspects, This is the negative side, First of all, Hate evil, See, If we love the Lord, We cannot be indifferent, To the sins, In our own lives, We cannot be indifferent, To the evils, Of the world, God will vindicate, The faithful, Notice he preserves, The lives of his saints, He delivers them, From the hands, Of the wicked, Now that does not mean, What some people, Would want us to mean, That every time,

[ 15 : 59 ] There is any trouble, Every time, There is any distress, God will automatically, Snatch us out of it, Sometimes he does that, Like in the, In the young men, Daniel's friends, In the blazing furnace, Or Daniel himself, In the lines, Then, Did you know that, Story in Daniel 3, You remember what, The young men said, Our God, Whom we serve, Whom we worship, Is able, To rescue us, And he will, Rescue us, Fair enough, That's how they go on, But even if he does not, We will not, Bow down, To the image, In other words, We will not start, Trusting in idols, We will not start, Trusting in other gods, Because, We believe, That this God, Will vindicate us, If not in this world, Certainly, In the world to come, See, There's always this, Forward thrust, Always this sense, That the best, Is yet to be, He preserves, The lives of his saints, He delivers them,

From the hand of the wicked, And of course, There's so often in scripture, There's a collective aspect, To this, Meaning, He preserves his people, We're not so much, Talking about individuals, He preserves his people, He holds his people, In his hands, And that continues, Throughout history, See, Too often, We don't hate evil, Do we?

Particularly, If it's the evil, In our own hearts, Too often, Too often, What we hate, Is a reflection, Of our own pride, Isn't it?

An injured vanity, We don't really hate evil, What we do hate, Of course, Is when people, Slight us, When people ignore us, When people don't give us, What we think is due to us, We really hate that, Don't we?

At least, I certainly do, And I imagine, And I imagine, This will find an echo, At least in some hearts here, But you see, If we don't hate evil, We'll indulge in it, If we don't hate gossip, We will gossip, If we don't hate telling lies, We'll tell lies, If we don't hate pride, We'll be arrogant, I used to think, When I was young, That pride was something, That belonged only, To a few conceited people, As I grow older, I realize, Daily, That pride, Is the natural human condition, Without the grace of God, You who love the Lord, Hate evil, That's the negative, The negative, The things you need to get rid of, But there's the positive, Please don't read into this, The gospel of good works, This is the gospel of grace, You who love the Lord, You who are in a covenant relationship, With the Lord, You to whom God has come, In his grace, Rejoice,

[ 18 : 49 ] In the Lord, O you righteous, And give thanks to his holy name, Now the righteous, Does not mean, The good, Does not mean, The pious, And the sanctimonious, The righteous, Means those, Who have been made, Right with God, By grace, And these only people, Can truly rejoice, And truly praise God, As long as I'm harboring, Pride in my heart, As long as I, Like lies, And gossip, And all these unpleasant things, And I'm not truly, Praising God, I mean, Remember the letter of James says, It's so wrong, To praise God, And then, And then curse people, We don't do that, Do we?

Of course we do, How often have we sung heartily, The closing hymn, And then gone out and said, Oh did you hear about so and so, That is praising the Lord, And cursing men, The power of praise, Because you see, Ultimately, This is an evangelistic psalm, This is saying, Where God's grace, Is shown in God's people, Where his love, Shines out of them, Where they are praising him, That is a powerful message, To the world, An ancient enemy of Christianity, Once wrote, See how these Christians, Love one another, Doesn't mean see how these Christians, Are nice to one another, Anyone can be nice, Nice in a matter of temperament, This is genuine love, That comes from God's grace, In what sense, Then, As we come, As we come to an end, As we come back, To the first word, In what sense, Is it true, That the Lord reigns, Well the Lord, First of all, Needs to be given,

A bigger place, In your life, And my life, To reign, In my life, And then, If, If he reigns, In my life, If he reigns, In your life, If he reigns, In our lives, Then that becomes, A great object lesson, To the world, If our fellowships, Are places, Where he reigns, If our communities, Are saturated, With his grace, Then others, Will come, Others will rejoice, And others, Will be able, To say, In faith, And in confidence, The Lord reigns, See, At the very heart, Of the message, Of the Bible, Is this, God will be God, And the world, Will know it, Amen, Let's pray, May God, Our Father, In our, From our, Lives, Which are so full, Of things, That are, Not pleasing to you, We come,

Conscious, Of the need, Of the cleansing, Power, Of your word, And of your spirit, We trust, In your grace, Alone, And ask, That indeed, Day by day, Our lives, Will proclaim, This great truth, To the world, That the Lord reigns, And that as we rejoice, Others may come, To rejoice with us, And we ask this, In the strong name, Of Jesus Christ, Our Lord, Amen.