

Rejoicing at His Coming

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 February 2015

Preacher: Bob Fyall

[0 : 0 0] Well, could I welcome us all to this Lunchtime Bible Talk. It's good to see you. If you're a newcomer, a particular welcome, but whether you're new or old, old in the sense of attending, not in the sense of age, you're very welcome.

This week and next week, we're going to put a couple of Psalms, Psalms 98 and 99. One other thing I'll say at the beginning, I have to leave immediately after, so I won't be hanging around.

I'm teaching at Corn Hill immediately after this, and I really don't want to deprive them or raise their hopes if I'm late. Now, we'll begin then by reading our passage, which is on page 500 in the Visitor's Bible.

Psalms 98 on page 500. And this is described as a psalm.

You may say they're all psalms. I'll comment on that in a minute or two. The psalmist writes, Oh, sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things.

[1 : 1 9] His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The Lord has made known his salvation and revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.

He has remembered his steadfast 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, 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. 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.

[2 : 2 3] Amen. That is the word of the Lord. So let's have a moment of prayer. Lord our God, King and Ruler of the earth, the one to whom one day every knee will bow, and every tongue express honour and praise.

Help us in these moments to think on you, on your goodness, on your greatness, on the wonder of who you are and what you have done and what you will yet do.

And help us as we leave here, to leave here encouraged and strengthened by the words that you are speaking to us and by the truth that you are telling us.

And so open our hearts, Lord. Open our minds. Open our eyes to see wonderful things in your word. And we ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. I want you to imagine two pictures. One picture is a happy, pleasant scene.

[3 : 3 2] It's in summertime. Beside a stream that's flowing gently. Children are playing happily. Their parents are nearby. The whole scene suggests peace, tranquility, and joy.

I want you to imagine another scene. The skies are dark. There are burning houses. Children are screaming with terror.

And the whole situation is one of chaos and of death. If I were to say to you, these scenes happen on the same planet, it's difficult to believe.

But we know that's true. And the planet they happen on is our own planet, planet Earth. You've got the pleasant, happy, rejoicing scenes, peaceful and harmonious, where children play happily.

Very interesting. The prophet Zechariah, when he talks about the new creation, one of the things he talks about is children playing in the streets, a place of safety.

[4 : 40] You've got the other scenes, which are all too familiar in many parts of the world. Chaos, darkness, and devastation. Now, the Bible is very, very well aware of that.

The Bible doesn't encourage us to believe that this world is a fairytale place. On the other hand, it does encourage us to believe that one day, God will create a new heaven and a new earth in which there is righteousness.

He hasn't given up on this world. And this psalm, which we've read together, is a psalm both of the present and of the future. There are elements in this psalm which are true today.

Like, as I say, the first scene where children are playing, people are happy and people are rejoicing. And yet, there is an awareness that all is not well.

This world is under the curse. It's part of a group of psalms, 95 to 97, which is special there about the creator, about the kingship. And today, our title is Rejoicing at His Coming, looking forward to the time when the king will return, take over his realm, and reign in righteousness.

[5 : 55] As I said, at the beginning, it's called the psalm, which is rather odd. They're all psalms. But this suggests it was composed for a particular occasion.

And the occasion may well be the return of God's people from exile. The exile in Babylon is over. They're returning to their own land, which is certainly not, as Isaiah had said, blossoming like the rose and so on.

But they're back home. Indeed, another psalm, Psalm 126, talking about the end of exile, says, When the Lord brought us back to Zion, we were like those who dreamed.

Our mouths were filled with laughter, and our tongues with songs of joy. They rejoiced and praised the creator. So it may well be that this psalm refers to that.

But obviously, it's a general psalm as well. It's a psalm about creation. It falls very clearly into three parts. Verses 1 to 3, the call to worship.

[6 : 58] And then two responses. There is worldwide human praise in verses 4 to 6. Then there's what I would call the symphony of creation. Creation itself praises the Lord.

So let's look, first of all, at verses 1 to 3, the call to worship. Oh, sing to the Lord a new song. New because, as I say, it's the end of exile.

The book of Lamentations, which comes right from the middle of exile, has the wonderful expression, Your mercies are new every morning. After all, think about it.

Every day when we get up, well, we may not be happy at getting up, but every day we're still alive. We're still breathing. God is still caring for us.

There's always something to thank the Lord for. Since we're human, there's always something to complain about as well, but this psalm focuses on thanksgiving.

[8 : 00] There are many examples in the Bible. When the people of Israel left Egypt, we have the Song of Moses, the Song of the Sea, in Exodus 15, when God's people rejoiced, that their God had rescued them from the tyranny of Egypt.

Then in the Psalter itself, Psalm 46 and 48, when the Lord rescued them from the Assyrians. And here, if this is the return from exile, as Isaiah says, the redeemed of the Lord are returning with singing to Zion.

He has done marvelous things. Now, very often our lives become flat and stale, don't they? And that's why we need psalms like this to help us to praise God.

He has done marvelous things, rescued his people from exile, rescued us, and made us children of God. And notice his right hand and his holy arm.

This suggests his personal involvement. It's not remote control. It's not he's sitting in some far-off super space pressing buttons and not really caring about the result.

[9 : 07] His right hand and his holy arm. He's not personally involved on behalf of his people. Now, this is the subject of Revelation. Verse 2, The Lord has made known.

The Lord has revealed. Now, you can look around at the wonders of creation. You can look up at the night sky. Look at the wonder of animal life. The beauty of earth and sky.

That doesn't necessarily mean you'll praise the Creator. David Attenborough probably knows more about the planet than anybody else on the planet. And talks about it most eloquently if you've ever seen his programs.

But sadly, he doesn't see beyond that to the Creator. Though I heard recently he had said he hadn't closed his mind to the possibility of the Creator.

It's important we pray for people like that who know so much about creation but don't know the Creator. It's always possible to look at it and say it's just happened that way.

[10 : 09] Possible to look at the story of the Exodus. A group of slaves on the edge of the Egyptian Empire found an inspirational leader and managed to escape and establish a petty kingdom.

Or take the cross itself. Everybody, almost everybody got it wrong, didn't they? Only two people got it right. The dying criminal, most astonishingly of all, Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom.

And the centurion, truly this man, was the Son of God. So God reveals to us what he's about in his Word. And it's not just brute force.

He has revealed his righteousness. It's not just overcoming the powers of evil by superior power. It's creating a better world. And he is committed to that.

He has remembered his steadfast love. That's the love that God has for his people. He's promised he'll rescue them. He still promises. But also, all the ends of the earth, as the gospel grows, as more and more people hear the gospel, as more and more people give their lives to the Lord, so the kingdom increases.

[11 : 24] And one day, this will be fully seen. So we have a call to worship, which is based on who God is, what God is doing. That has two responses, as I said.

First of all, worldwide, human praise. Verse 4, make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Break into joyous song and sing praises or shout to the Lord, all the earth.

You get this in the prophet Zechariah, shout for your king comes, meek and lowly. That was fulfilled when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday.

A cry of loyalty and allegiance. He doesn't look at the moment as if the Lord is king. Look at the, listen to the news, look what's happening in the Middle East.

Look into our own hearts and our own communities. The suffering, the despair, the death, and so on. Now, in this praise of humans, there are two elements.

[12 : 25] First of all, there's spontaneous enjoyment. Verse 5, sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, the sound of melody, with trumpets, the sound of horn, make a joyful noise.

The blend of voices and instruments. And the verbs are continuous, suggesting active involvement. Great writer, hymn writer, Charles Wesley, said this, Sing lustily and with a good courage.

Beware of singing as if you were half dead or half asleep. But lift up your voice with strength. Be no more afraid of your voices now, no more ashamed of it being heard, than when you sang the songs of Satan.

Now, not all of us have voices that are a joy to listen to. That would have to be said. But, Wesley himself, of course, his own example, Oh for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise.

Oh for a trumpet sound on all the world to call. When I go to a football match and listen to the songs, they're not usually sung head down and mumbling.

[13 : 41] They're joyful. Sometimes, of course, in the case of my team, it's more a matter of faith than of experience. But, there you go. There may be in the new creation a place where Newcastle United will win the league.

But, that's maybe expecting far too much. Anyway, spontaneous enjoyment. singing words that we enjoy, words that we believe in.

But, there's another element that is articulate praise. It's not just spontaneous. But, after all, we can sing mindless ditties heartily. We can sing endless repetitive words which really don't mean very much.

What are these people singing? They're singing great truths about God. Very important. Not only that we have good songs with good music, but they have good theology.

Often being said, people get far more theology from hymns and songs than they do from sermons. As a preacher, that rather disappoints me by suspicion that it's true. That's why it's so important we sing songs and hymns with content in them.

[14 : 51] And there is content in this. The Lord is King. That is to say, ruler of all creation. The universe is a mysterious place.

And vast, lonely, and rather terrifying. When we sing that the Lord is the creator, we are singing, in a sense, this is our father's house.

As one old American hymn puts it. Talking about the created order, this is my father's house. Ultimately, all its mysteries, he's in control. He is the Lord, Yahweh, Israel's God.

The Lord of the covenant to whose praises we sing because he has promised to keep his promises. And we sing with joy.

Now next week in Psalm 99, we're going to look at the other side of it. We sing with awe and reverence as well. These two aren't, of course, incompatible. They belong together.

[15 : 52] But this song, Psalm 98, especially emphasizes the joy. And there's the sense of loving relationship. So, the worship of humanity is the worship of enjoyment and of articulate praise.

Now, I know very well that there are many times when we find it very difficult, if not impossible, to sing joyful songs.

We go to church, a joyful song is announced and our heart is breaking. A joyful song is announced and we're struggling to keep our faith.

Now, that's why this book, the Psalms as a whole, are so important. Because the Psalms gives us words for these times as well. Remember, when we remember the important thing, this is where the articulate praise is important.

If we're simply singing a song that talks about me and about my feelings, I'm going to find it impossible to sing joyful songs if I'm grieving and heartbroken.

[17 : 02] But, if these are great truths about God that don't depend on my feelings, then it's still possible to sing, to hold on to God in the dark, believing.

That's why I think elsewhere the Bible talks about the sacrifice of praise. It's not easy to sing these words in days of difficulty.

And we're singing them in days of difficulty and tragedy. We're singing them because they're not just nice words and happy feelings. They're great truths about God.

Somebody said, I don't know who it was, never forget in the dark what God revealed to you in the light. This is a psalm of light. This is a psalm of rejoicing.

So, that it's not the whole of the psalm. And we must remember that. So, we have the call to worship because of who God is, what he has done. We have the response of humanity.

[18 : 01] And then, thirdly, verses 7 to 9, we have the symphony of creation itself. Let the sea roar. Let the rivers clap their hands. Let the hills sing for joy together.

It's again the language of poetry. Now, once again, you can see this partially happening. A few weeks ago, I spent a very, very happy weekend at a pleasant seaside town, wonderful, walking along the shore, listening to the sound of the waves and the cries of the seabirds.

That gives a kind of anticipation of what the new creation will be like. The rivers clapping their hands, the hills singing for joy.

But this creation, let's say, is under a curse. It's not just the night sky and the moonlight and autumn woods and the springtime coming into the earth. We'd like to see snowdrops as I walked to the station this morning.

And even the signs of one or two daffodils beginning to push their way through the earth. We know there's also tsunamis and acid rain, earthquakes, and so on.

[19 : 13] So ultimately, this is about the new creation where none of these things will be there. Just a couple of things. First of all, God's ancient enemies will praise him.

Throughout the Bible, the sea and the rivers, they're not just geographical expressions. Very often, they're symbols of the haunt of evil, the dark powers which threaten God and his purposes.

That's why on the Lake of Galilee, when Jesus stood up and rebuked the sea, the disciples, awestruck, said, who then is this that even the winds and the waves obey him?

In the new creation, even the ancient enemies are no longer hostile. Land and sea fully what they were created to be.

After all, the sea is a place of tragedy as well as a place of beauty, a place where many have drowned, where many tragedies have happened. In the book of Revelation, just before the new creation, John says, the sea gave up the dead which was in it.

[20 : 21] So, in the new creation, the whole of heaven, earth, under the earth and the sea in full harmony. What they were created to be.

So, that's the first thing. The second thing is, why does creation praise God? Verse 9, before the Lord, for he comes, that's what he comes for, to judge the earth.

That, of course, causes us to tremble, rightly. And we'll see this next week in Psalm 99. When you think of it, he comes to judge, he comes to get rid of the curse.

He comes to destroy evil. He comes to destroy death itself and create a glorious world. See, if God does not judge the world, then this mixture of good and evil, this mixture of life and death, is going to continue indefinitely.

And indeed, that's essentially what the pagan neighbors of ancient Israel believed. They were surrounded by people who believed in gods. These gods were largely human inventions.

[21 : 32] Their idea of history was an endless cycle. Sometimes, sometimes good prevailed, sometimes evil prevailed. The idea was the pendulum would swing to all eternity.

The gospel says something totally different. One day, the pendulum will cease swinging. One day, the Lord, the Creator, will return and he will judge the world.

He will remove the evil. He will remove the curse. And the world will be what he created it to be. And his people will be what he created them to be.

God hasn't changed his purpose since the beginning of Genesis. He created humanity to rule the earth. And that is his purpose for the future. And once the people of God are totally like Christ, they will be able to take up that mandate.

And as Paul says in Romans 8, when the children of God are finally liberated from sin and darkness and death, then creation itself will be finally liberated.

[22 : 34] This is a very fine psalm. It's, as I say, it's a realistic psalm. It doesn't pretend there isn't evil. But above all, it's a... Sam is telling us to keep on praising and to keep on believing because they belong together.

not keep on whistling in the dark, but keep on believing that the Lord is King, that God will be God, and the world will know it.

Amen. Let's pray. Apostle John writes, I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.

Father, we look forward to that new creation. We thank you for the glimpses you have given us, even in this fallen and broken creation. We pray, as we live our lives and as we spread that glorious gospel, that more and more people will be swept into that kingdom.

More and more lives will anticipate the day when the whole of the created order, the whole of redeemed humanity, will praise your name forever and ever.

[23 : 43] Amen.