

1. Welcoming the King

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[0 : 00] Psalm 96. Oh, sing to the Lord a new song. Sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless his name. Tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples.

For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised. He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens.

Splendor and majesty are before him. Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples. Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name. Bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness. Tremble before him, all the earth.

Say among the nations, the Lord reigns. Yes, the world is established. It shall never be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity.

[1 : 09] Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice. Let the sea roar, and all that fills it. Let the field exult, and everything in it.

Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord. For he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness.

That is the word of the Lord, and may he indeed bless it to our hearts and minds. Let's pray for a moment. Lord God, you are great, and you are greatly to be praised.

You are the rock of our salvation. You are a great God, and a great King above all gods. As we meet for these few moments, to listen to your word, to think together of the great truths in it, to wonder before you, and to tremble at your holiness, we ask indeed that you will open this word to us.

We ask that we will understand at least a little of what these verses are saying about you, and have the appropriate response to what we hear.

[2 : 26] And we pray, Lord, that when we return to our normal business, to our homes, to our families, to our lives, to however we are going to be doing for the rest of today, that we will carry something of the wonder and the glory of your love with us.

We thank you, Lord, that even in this world there are blessings. There are many good things that you give us. We thank you for the past four days of celebration of Her Majesty the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, thanking you for the faithfulness and diligence and dedication that has marked her reign, and for the example she has been, and praying for the Duke of Edinburgh, that he will soon be restored to health, and praying indeed for the future of our nation, a nation which has been so much blessed over the centuries by your word, and yet which so often now is turning its back on that same word which built it up as a nation.

And we pray indeed, Father, that the Lord's name may be praised, and his word may be heard once again in our land. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. So, Psalm 96. Many people, when they quote the motto of this city, simply quote the least important words, let Glasgow flourish.

But the motto goes on, as you know to say, by the preaching of his word, and by the praising of his name. And in these Psalms, Psalms 96 to 99, which we're going to be looking at over the next few weeks, that's what we're going to focus on, the praising of his name through the preaching of his word.

[4 : 22] Because these Psalms are the hymn book of ancient Israel, but they're not just the hymn book of ancient Israel, these are words for us to sing as well, because the people of God and the new covenant are continuous with the people of God in the old covenant.

And the words given here are the kind of words that we can sing when we cannot find words of our own. Times of spiritual dryness, in times when we find it hard to find words to say to the Lord.

Here are words given to us. And this particular Psalm, Psalm 96, this was a Psalm sung by David and by his companions.

You can read this in the book of Chronicles, 1 Chronicles 16, as they took the Ark of the Covenant up to Jerusalem. As they placed that Ark, which was the symbol of the presence of the Lord in Jerusalem, the heart of David's kingdom.

And there's a sense of great excitement in this psalm. Vigorous, sing to the Lord, declare his glory, worship him, tremble before him, say among the nations that the Lord reigns.

[5 : 35] The big Old Testament themes that God is the creator, and that God is the savior, really run through this psalm, and give it its exuberance. It's described as a new song.

Not new in the sense that no one had ever spoken about, these things before, but new in the sense of freshness. These are truths which had been proclaimed, which had been sung about for long, long before this, the time of the writing of the psalm.

But they come here with newness, new every morning. So as the book of Lamentations says, God's mercies are new every morning, and therefore there is a new song.

And really the song falls, I think, into two parts. Verses 1 to 10, which is really asking, who is like the Lord?

Or why is he to be praised? And then the last part of the psalm, verses 11 to 13, which I've called, what of the future?

[6 : 39] Does this psalm really, really tell us the truth? So first of all, who is like the Lord? Why do we praise him?

You see, the Lord is not simply praised, because it's the done thing to do, in a Christian church. The first thing is, he is the Lord of all the earth.

He's not some kind of local godlet. He's not someone to be praised, only by certain people, certain nations, certain communities. He is the Lord of the whole earth.

Praise the Lord, all the earth. That's why these psalms are relevant to us, and not just to God's ancient people. What does it mean to sing to the Lord? Does it simply mean to sing these words, or other words?

It means a lot more than that. First of all, we sing to the Lord, understanding what we are singing. We have reasons for singing to the Lord. First of all, he is, as I said, he is the creator.

[7 : 42] In him, we live, and move, and have our being. There is nothing, in heaven and earth, that he has not made. There is nothing, in heaven and earth, that does not belong to him.

And secondly, he is the savior. He has, the reason we can sing to him, is because, he has changed our hearts. We can still sing these words, even if we don't believe them.

But we sing them with, we sing to the Lord, in the true sense of the meaning, when we sing with understanding, and with enthusiasm. Now, I am not suggesting, necessarily, that football singing, football crowds in a stadium, are a model.

But, at least, when you hear football crowds singing, you know, that they are meaning, what they are saying. When I go to see my favorite team, I find myself, caught up in that enthusiasm, and, it's not a Scottish team.

And, if you, if you take the train, from Edinburgh, you will find, you will find the home, of my favorite team, in the first big city, you come to, across the, English border.

[8 : 52] That's all I'm going to say. And, so, when we sing, to the Lord, we sing, because of who he is, and, because of what he has done.

But, we also sing, to the Lord, because, verse 4, he is to be feared. Sense of his majesty, the sense of the mystery, the sense that life, is impossible, and meaningless, without him.

Sing to the Lord, for he is to be feared, above all gods, for all the gods, of the people, are worthless idols. Israel, was surrounded, by people, believed in gods.

Many, many gods. But, they were actually, all godlets. They controlled, part of the universe, or part of human life. You had the god of the sea, the god of the sky, the god of the hills, the god of the plains, the god to whom you prayed, if you wanted help, in your work, the god to whom you prayed, if you wanted help, in your relationships, and so on.

So, the pagan heart, was hopelessly divided. Whereas, the god of Israel, was not just, the god of Israel, he was the god, who controlled, the whole of life.

[10 : 06] Gods of the people, are worthless idols. What's the point, of bowing down, and worshipping, to something less, than ourselves? Prophet Isaiah, talks about that, a workman, creates, creates an image, and people fall down, in front of it.

What's the point, it's something less, less than us, much, much less, than God himself, but even less, than ourselves. But the lord, made the heavens. And you see, the practicality, of that, if the lord, made the heavens, if the lord, made the earth, if he is the creator, then every part, of my life, is related to him.

There is nothing, in my life, that I have to pray, to a rival god, about. And there is nothing, in heaven or earth, or in my life, that is, not under, his control.

So, he is the creator, he is the savior. Why do we praise him, who is like the lord? And in verses seven, and eight, there is, there is introduced, and developed, the further idea, ascribe to the lord, O families, of the peoples.

Families of nations, way back, in Genesis 12, God had said, to Abraham, in you, all the families, all the nations, of the earth, will be blessed.

[11 : 31] And go on, to the words, of Jesus, in John chapter, John chapter 12, if I am lifted up, from the earth, I will draw, all peoples, to me.

And then, in the book of Acts, chapter 2, all nations, under heaven, hear the mighty works, of God, in their own language, and flash forward, to Revelation chapter 7, around the throne of God, there are people, of every nation, tribe, and language.

That's our mandate, of course, for taking the gospel, to the whole world. Go, into all the world, and teach, all nations. That's why the gospel, as I say, can never be narrowed down, to a group, never narrowed down, to a national, or ethnic, or other kind of group, because God, is the God, of the whole world.

Ascribe to the Lord, glory, and strength. Now, glory, is a word, that's often used, vaguely, by people. Glory, has two particular meanings.

Glory, means, first of all, utter reality. God, is utterly real. Everything else, in the universe, is relative to him. And also, it means, the blinding light, by which we see the reality.

[12 : 50] So really, what we are saying, is, are we living in the real world? The world that's lit up, by the glory of God. The world, in which his great acts, in creation, and salvation.

And what are we to do then? Ascribe to the Lord, verse 8, the glory, due his name, bring an offering, and come into his courts. Now, in old Israel, that was literal sacrifices, the literal sacrifice, of an animal, which represented, the worshipper, and, represented his sins, being covered, and taken away.

But that's still true for us. Paul says, in Romans 12, present your bodies, a living sacrifice, which is your reasonable worship. So if somebody asks you, where do you worship?

The answer is not, primarily, St. George's, Toronto, or whatever other church, you may worship in. The answer is, wherever my body happens to be. Bring an offering, bring the offering, of our, of our daily lives.

Worship, is our, worship the Lord, in the splendor of holiness, verse 9, tremble before him, all the earth. This trembling, is very important.

[14 : 04] We mustn't treat this God, lightly. He has come to us, in the Lord Jesus Christ, shown us his tenderness, and his compassion. But he is still the same Lord, before whom all the earth, is to tremble.

Say among the nations, the Lord reigns. Yes, the world is established, it shall never be moved. He shall judge the people, with equity. So, this is a universal message.

This is a message, for every day, and for every place, and for every land. Who is like the Lord, and why do we praise him? We praise him, because he is the creator, because he is the savior, because he makes, and he remakes, because one day, he will create, a new heaven, and a new earth.

That brings us, to the second part, verses 10 to 13, which I've called, what of the future? Because, this seems, just like whistling, in the dark, sometimes, doesn't it? Say among the nations, the Lord reigns.

Well, it doesn't look like that, in many places, does it? Suppose you go to Sudan, or Somalia, and say, the Lord reigns. Say it, to the impoverished people, who are treated, so dreadfully, by, tyrannical regimes.

[15 : 31] It doesn't look, as if the Lord reigns, over so much, of the earth. There's little evidence, internationally, nationally, communally, or personally, that the Lord reigns.

And that's where, this note is introduced. Verse 13, for he comes, he comes, to judge the earth. Now, that's so important.

If we simply, praise the Lord, for his greatness, and his goodness, and we do that, of course. And if we simply, do that, and look round, at the world, look into our own hearts, we well feel, we well feel, that it's hype, we're saying things, that aren't real.

But, what makes it real, is before the Lord, for he comes, one day, he is going, to intervene, personally, and introduce, a new heaven, and a new earth.

And, the reality, verses 11 to 13, will be fully seen then. Let the heavens be glad, the earth rejoice, let the sea roar, and all that fills it, let the field exult, and everything that is in it, then shall all the trees, of the forest, sing for joy.

[16 : 48] Now, it's possible, even to see that now, to rejoice, in the good creation, of the Lord, to look up, at the night sky, walk, among woodland, listen to the waves, look at the moon, shining on the waters, the earth, is beautiful, the earth is good, even at the moment, but yet, the earth is under the curse, as well, isn't it?

There are storms, there's drought, there's earthquakes, there's floods, there's evil, all over the world. And that is why, the judgment, the Lord coming to judge, is seen as something, to cause rejoicing.

Causes trembling, certainly, also to cause rejoicing. Because when the Lord comes, he will introduce, a new creation, in which will be righteousness, in which will be rejoicing.

And this is the idea, that's developed right through scripture. God is at the moment, calling out from among the nations, of people for his name. He is making them, like his son.

In this world, imperfectly seen, in this world, only partially realized. But on that great day, when Christ returns, and when his children, are fully like him, then creation itself, will be redeemed, from its slavery.

[18 : 14] And the ancient promise, given to humanity, to be stewards of the earth, will be fulfilled again. That's how big a thing, the gospel is.

Not just the salvation, of individual souls, but, the renewal, of the whole earth. I often say, to the Cornhill students, the whole Bible, the Bible is divided, into two parts.

Not the Old, and the New Testament, but Genesis 1, verse 1, and the rest. The rest of the Bible, really is the development, of Genesis 1, verse 1. In the beginning, God created the heavens, and the earth.

And he is going to, complete that task. He is going to, do it magnificently, in a way we can, scarcely imagine. And this is seen here, by the rejoicing, of creation.

Free from its slavery, free from its bondage, free from the curse. Because the Lord, is coming to judge, the world in righteousness, and the people, in his faithfulness.

[19 : 14] faithfulness. Not an arbitrary tyrant, not, not simply, a revolution, that replaces, one set of top people, by another set of top people, but a whole new creation, in which, the words of that, this psalm, will be fully, and perfectly, fulfilled, and indeed, the, a new song, will be sung, to the Lord, of the whole earth.

So, as we come to an end, just do things. First of all, we must have a sense, of the greatness, of the gospel. The creator, and the savior, who will create, a new heaven, and a new, and a new earth.

And secondly, see, among the nations. That's what, that's the message, for the nations. All the nations, of the world, and, one of the great things, about worshipping, together here, is a number of nations, through a number, of different people, from different nations, who come.

So, make the hearing, and the proclaiming, of that, a priority, because that, is good news, and that, is the gospel. Amen.

Let's pray. Lord God, help us even now, to sing that song, to rejoice, in your goodness, to rejoice, in your love, and to tremble, before your holiness.

[20 : 39] help us, to be more faithful, in our declaring, that among the nations, and in revealing, to people, the wonders, of him, who called us, out of darkness, into his marvelous light.

We pray this, in the strong name, of Jesus. Amen.