

Christ's Advent in the Psalms

The Lord Reigns

Psalm 97:1-12

Rev. Freddy Fritz

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The Lord Reigns

Scripture

Today is the Fourth Sunday of Advent in 2021. We continue in our sermon series, “Christ’s Advent in the Psalms.”

Today I want to examine Psalm 97. This Psalm is one of seven so-called “Theocratic Psalms” (Psalms 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, and 100). The theme of all seven Psalms is: “The Lord reigns as King over all the earth.” Three of these Psalms begin with the words “The LORD reigns” (Psalms 93, 97, and 99), and the other four Psalms begin with a call to sing to the LORD because he reigns (Psalms 95, 96, 98, and 100).

Psalm 96 (which we examined last time), Psalm 97, and Psalm 98 each announce the Lord’s coming as the world’s king. But whereas Psalms 96 and 98 pulsate with joy and expectation at the coming of the Lord, Psalm 97 shows the awesome side of the Lord’s coming, especially for those who are unprepared for the coming of the Lord.

Let us read Psalm 97:1-12:

- ¹ The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice;
let the many coastlands be glad!**
- ² Clouds and thick darkness are all around him;
righteousness and justice are the
foundation of his throne.**
- ³ Fire goes before him
and burns up his adversaries all around.**
- ⁴ His lightnings light up the world;
the earth sees and trembles.**
- ⁵ The mountains melt like wax before the Lord,
before the Lord of all the earth.**

- ⁶The heavens proclaim his righteousness,
and all the peoples see his glory.
- ⁷All worshipers of images are put to shame,
who make their boast in worthless idols;
worship him, all you gods!
- ⁸Zion hears and is glad,
and the daughters of Judah rejoice,
because of your judgments, O Lord.
- ⁹For you, O Lord, are most high over all the earth;
you are exalted far above all gods.
- ¹⁰O you who love the Lord, hate evil!
He preserves the lives of his saints;
he delivers them from the hand of the wicked.
- ¹¹Light is sown for the righteous,
and joy for the upright in heart.
- ¹²Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous,
and give thanks to his holy name! (Psalm 97:1-
12)

Introduction

Do you know what is involved when the President of the United States travels? There is much more involved than one might think. For example, Secret Service agents scope out the President's destination months ahead of time, sometimes by as much as three months. The Secret Service identify people they need to watch. They even contact people who have been known to harbor animosity toward the President and warn them that they will be watching their every move. Dogs help the Secret Service search for bombs. During his travel, the Secret Service carry several pints of the President's blood, in case he is injured and they need to administer emergency treatment

before he can get to a hospital. These procedures – and many more – accompany the President whenever he travels.

Christians know that the Lord Jesus Christ has come once, and we celebrate that advent every Christmas. But, we also know that he is coming again. We call that the Second Advent of the Lord. A lot of things will take place with the Second Advent of the Lord.

Lesson

Psalm 97:1-12 shows us the coming of the Lord to judge unbelievers and to reward believers.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Description of the Second Advent of the Lord on the Earth (97:1-5)
2. The Effect of the Second Advent of the Lord on Unbelievers (97:6-7)
3. The Effect of the Second Advent of the Lord on Believers (97:8-9)
4. The Encouragement of the Second Advent of the Lord to Believers (97:10-12)

I. **The Description of the Second Advent of the Lord on the Earth (97:1-5)**

First, let us look at the description of the Second Advent of the Lord on the earth.

The Psalmist writes in verse 1, **“The LORD reigns, let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad!”** The first assertion is that **the LORD reigns**. The Psalmist acknowledged the Lord's sovereign rule over all the earth. And yet in that assertion there is also a looking forward to the First

Advent of Jesus. Jesus' First Advent was the inauguration of his reign. After his ascension, Jesus is now sitting at the Father's right hand where he is ruling and reigning and waiting for the Father to send him back for his Second Advent. Meanwhile, the good news of Jesus' reign gives rise to the earth rejoicing and the people of many coastlands being glad. From the perspective of the Psalmist, all the foreign peoples live on distant coastlands. And so the First Advent of Jesus brings great gladness to all who surrender to his reign.

The Psalmist goes on in verse 2, **“Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.”** Surely, the Psalmist was thinking of Mount Sinai where the Lord revealed himself to Moses in a thick cloud. The Lord's essential deity could not be seen by anyone, and so he surrounded himself in **clouds and thick darkness** so that his glory would not destroy any human. Moreover, God's government is based on **righteousness and justice**. People may get away with murder in this life; but they will have to appear before the ultimate bar of justice and there they will encounter perfect **righteousness and justice**.

The Psalmist continues in verses 3-5, **“Fire goes before him and burns up his adversaries 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 picture is one of terrific destruction at the Second Advent of the Lord. **Mountains** in ancient times were seen as steady and stable. They were seen as unmovable. Moreover, people in the ancient Near East believed that mountains were the places where their gods, who came from the heavens, came down to earth and communed with people. The Psalmist is taunting their foreign gods with this vivid description. He insists that the true God will melt the **mountains** like

wax. And he can do so since he created the **mountains** in the first place.

Did you know that the fastest-growing religion in our culture is that of the “Nones”? That is those who profess to have “No Religion.” They either don’t believe in God or don’t know if there is a God. And so they choose “None” as their religion of choice. However, the truth is that everyone is religious. Everyone believes in some supreme power, even if they think that Man is that supreme power. One day Jesus will return for his Second Advent. All people and all things – like mountains – will melt like wax before the Lord. His return will be the most sensational event in their lifetimes. But then it will be too late to turn to the Lord. It will be too late to acknowledge that the people were wrong and the Christians were right. It will be too late to enter the kingdom of God.

II. The Effect of the Second Advent of the Lord on Unbelievers (97:6-7)

Second, let us see the effect of the Second Advent of the Lord on unbelievers.

The Psalmist writes in verse 6, **“The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory.”** The heavens will proclaim his righteousness. More than that, **all the peoples will see his glory.** The Psalmist knows that sin brought a curse not only on man but also on creation itself.

The Psalmist continues to describe the reaction of unbelievers to the Second Advent of the Lord, and writes in verse 7, **“All worshipers of images are put to shame, who make their boast in worthless idols; worship him, all you gods!”** When the Lord returns at his Second Advent, he will put to shame all unbelievers since they worship false gods.

Most people in our culture do not worship a physical idol. They do not have a figure of some god carved out of stone or wood or some other material that they worship. That is not to say that unbelievers do not worship some god. Since God has created all people as worshipping creatures, all people worship something or someone. Some ascribe worth to their intellect and ability. Others ascribe worth to an unnamed “higher power.” Whatever it is that unbelievers worship, they will all be put to shame when Jesus returns. At that point, there will be no opportunity to reconsider and correct one’s view regarding the truth about Jesus. It will be too late. History will be over. So, let us as Christians who know the truth about Jesus tell others so that they will not be put to shame.

III. The Effect of the Second Advent of the Lord on Believers (97:8-9)

Third, let us look at the effect of the Second Advent of the Lord on believers.

The Psalmist writes in verses 8-9, **“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.”** These verses are describing the reaction of believers to the Second Advent of the Lord. At the First Advent of Jesus, after his resurrection and ascension, the gospel was preached in Jerusalem, which was also known as **Zion**. There were three thousand who were glad to hear the good news of salvation and were saved. Later, persecution against Christians arose and they scattered to other places. And so the gospel spread to the ends of the earth.

When the Lord Jesus returns for his Second Advent, Zion

shall once again hear of his return and be glad. **The daughters of Judah** and believers will rejoice because of the judgments of God. Believers will see their hope fulfilled. They will be with the Lord forever and ever. The mouths of unbelievers will be stopped. No longer will unbelievers gloat over Christians. Instead, they will intensely regret that they did not believe in the gospel, because for them it will be too late to become converted. So let us share the good news of the gospel, while there is still time before the Lord's Second Advent.

IV. The Encouragement of the Second Coming of the Lord to Believers (97:10-12)

And finally, let us observe the encouragement of the Second Coming of the Lord to believers.

Let us to see two ways in which believers are encouraged by the Second Coming of the Lord.

A. What the Lord Desires of Believers (97:10a)

First, notice what the Lord desires of believers.

We read in verse 10a, **“O you who love the LORD, hate evil!”** God hates evil. Therefore, believers must hate it as well. Believers cannot love God and also love what God hates. Believers must take an active stand against evil and wickedness and sin, first in our own hearts and lives, and then also in our communities.

B. What the Lord Does for Believers (97:10b-12)

And second, notice what the Lord does for believers.

First, the Lord protects the lives of believers. The Psalmist writes

in verse 10b, **“He preserves the lives of his saints.”** When I was a young Christian, our church had an evangelistic outreach to a community that was known to be riddled with alcohol, drugs, and gangs. We were told to wear suits and also to carry our Bibles. Though the community was downtrodden with sin, there was still enough knowledge and fear of God in that community. I remember going door to door and talking to people about the gospel. I saw bullet holes in door frames where gangs had shot into the houses. I saw people in dark rooms drinking alcohol and smoking drugs. Most of the people listened to us and no one was aggressive towards us. I know that not all neighborhoods or encounters are like that. There are cases where Christians are beaten and kidnapped and even killed. But surely for us, that was an instance of the Lord preserving the lives of his saints.

Second, the Lord delivers believers from the wicked. The Psalmist writes in verse 10c, **“he delivers them from the hand of the wicked.”** You may recall that on October 16, 2021 seventeen missionaries with Christian Aid Ministries were kidnapped by a Haitian gang called 400 Mawozo. The seventeen missionaries – 12 adults and 5 children, including an 8-month-old baby – were all finally released two months later on December 16, 2021. Many people have been praying daily for their release. And we rejoice as the truth of this verse is seen yet again.

Third, the Lord gives believers light. The Psalmist writes in verse 11, **“Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart.”** The Psalmist is encouraging believers in their walk with the Lord. We live in a world of darkness and sin. But as we walk with the Lord, we discover that the light of his truth shines on our path and we can walk in it. And as we walk in the light of gospel truth, we discover growing joy in our hearts. Charles Spurgeon wrote, “Those who are right-

hearted shall also be glad-hearted.”¹ If one watches advertisements on TV, it seems that people who partake of certain foods or drinks or activities are happy. There may be some happiness in partaking in those things. However, joy for believers is much deeper than that. Several years ago, I visited one of the poorest nations in the world. Though these dear people did not have the material wealth that we all have in this country, they nevertheless had a deep-seated joy. They were Christians and their joy in the Lord was evident. They were living testimony to the truth of verse 11, **“Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart.”**

And fourth, the Lord gives believers joy and thanksgiving. The Psalmist concludes Psalm 97 with these words, **“Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name!”** (97:12). Believers know God savingly and personally. We have come to know who God is and what he has done and is doing in our world. We believe that he is our Heavenly Father. And so it is right that we should rejoice in him. Moreover, because of all the blessings we have received as children of God, we give thanks to his holy name.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Psalm 97:1-12, let us be prepared for the Second Advent of Jesus.

One of the deadliest natural disasters in history was the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, also known as the Boxing Day Tsunami, because it took place on December 26, 2004. Its epicenter was off the west coast of Indonesia. An estimated

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Psalms 88-110*, vol. 4 (London; Edinburgh; New York: Marshall Brothers, n.d.), 197.

227,898 people in 14 countries died as a result of the tsunami.

In some places, the waves from the tsunami were 100 feet high. The destruction came in just a few minutes and was unimaginable. In Sri Lanka, for example, close to 40,000 people lost their lives and thousands of homes were demolished. It took months to recover from the devastation.

As the rebuilding process began, one of the strange discoveries found out that prior to the tsunami, animals in the wildlife reserves close to the sea, instinctively seemed to sense the danger that was approaching. As a result, they moved to higher ground or further inland and escaped the effects of the killer waves. After the tsunami, people also are now wiser as to what they should do, if a similar disaster threatens to strike again.²

Friends, the Lord is coming again. The Second Advent of the Lord will take place. It will take place suddenly. But you are not without warning. The Bible says, “Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). I urge you to prepare for the Second Advent of the Lord.

How should you prepare? You prepare for the Second Advent of the Lord by repenting of your sin and trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for your salvation. If you have never done so, repent and believe today. And if you do so, you will be prepared for the Second Advent of Jesus. Amen.

² See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2020/september/understanding-time-we-live-in.html>.

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The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org