

February 4, 2018  
Sunday Morning Service  
Series: Psalm  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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## SING PRAISE TO THE COMING KING

### Psalm 96

When I was a boy, I worked in a mom and pop kind of grocery store. One day a little girl from the neighborhood came into the store to buy some candy. I was picking on her a bit and she responded, “You better stop picking on me or I will tell my dad.” I said, “What will he do about it?” She said, “He is really big.” I asked, “How big is your dad?” She said, “He is ten feet long.” Obviously, her terminology was not correct, and no doubt her estimated measurement was off quite a bit. But the fact remains that this little girl was pretty impressed with her father who she saw as her protector.

Many of the psalms remind us that our loving Heavenly Father is very impressive, especially when contrasted to the make-believe gods of human imagination. Of course, in the ancient history of the human race, the make-believe gods were quite real to those who served them. False gods like Dagon of the Philistines, Molech of the Canaanites, and all the variations of the Baal god captivated the attention of those pagan people. The people feared them, made sacrifices to them, tried to please them, and really did believe that they would help them in time of need, grant them abundant harvests, and even help them conceive children.

God often challenged His people to assess those make-believe gods honestly. God’s challenge through Jeremiah was much like His challenge in Psalms 115, 135; Isaiah 41, 45, 46, and Habakkuk 2. God said through Jeremiah: “*Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good*” (Jeremiah 10:5).

We are capable of making idols and false gods out of almost anything. John Calvin said, “The human heart, so to speak, is a perpetual forge of idols.” We know from experience that when we finally destroy one idol in our hearts, our nature quickly invents another. The other day a thought along this line seemed to pop into my mind. Is your social media an idol, a feeble attempt to replace God? If you are lonely, do you communicate with God or with your hundreds of “social media friends”? If you need help in making a decision, who do you speak to first, God or your friends? Do you spend more time maintaining contact with your friends just in case you have a crisis and need them, or do you prefer to keep good fellowship with God just in case you have a crisis? Based on my communications over the past few years, there are a whole lot of Christians who have replaced God with Facebook and Twitter.

At times, God’s people Israel did the same foolish thing. They preferred the gods of their pagan neighbors to the true God Yahweh. But at times like the setting of Psalm 96, the people’s focus was firmly fixed on God – their God – the one true God. In this song the people expressed great joy over the reality that God the Creator was in their presence. The setting of this psalm helps us understand how we should respond with corporate worship when we know that our King allows us into His presence.

### Background of Psalm 96.

This song appears in the context of David bringing the ark to Jerusalem. It is instructive to compare the psalm to the story in 1 Chronicles 16:23-30 and see that this was the song the Levites sang at that very special occasion.

*Sing to the LORD, all the earth! 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, and he is to be held in awe above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and joy are in his place. Ascribe to the LORD, O clans of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! Ascribe to the LORD the*

*glory due his name; bring an offering and come before him! Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth; yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved (1 Chronicles 16:23-30).*

As you see, the song the Levites sang was virtually the same as the first ten verses of Psalm 96, with other psalms added.

In that setting, God's people had gathered to praise God. The reason for the praise was the bringing of the ark to Jerusalem. It was a really big deal. The ark of the covenant represented the presence of God. God promised to meet with His people at the mercy seat that was situated on the cover of the ark. The ark had never been in Jerusalem. God had promised that one day He would meet with His people at their sacrifices in "the city He would choose." But it was not revealed that Jerusalem was that city until David made it the capital of Israel. Now God's "presence" came to the city of His choice.

Now look at the particular traits of the song or how the song was sung. It was accompanied by loud music. *David also commanded the chiefs of the Levites to appoint their brothers as the singers who should play loudly on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise sounds of joy (1 Chronicles 15:16). So all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the LORD with shouting, to the sound of the horn, trumpets, and cymbals, and made loud music on harps and lyres (1 Chronicles 15:28).* Thinking about that array of instruments again leaves me with the opinion that this "music to the Lord" probably sounded like a cacophony. Or as John McCormick, former teacher at Tennessee Temple, used to say about his singing, "It sounds like a truck load of geese running into a truck load of tin cans."

Maybe that is not an altogether fair assessment of the music. It is very likely it was sung antiphonally. Antiphonal singing requires at least two choirs or groups. Maybe it would be two distinct choirs with one on each side of the auditorium. Or most commonly, one choir that is split down the middle with the left choir being choir "one" and the right choir being choir "two" which would be the answering or responsive choir. I actually enjoy listening to an antiphonal choir.

If Ezra and Nehemiah demonstrated the Davidic choir standard, we can easily see two distinct choirs in this setting when the ark was brought to Jerusalem. The antiphonal choirs were described at the dedication of the second temple under Ezra's leadership. *And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the directions of David king of Israel. And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD, "For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel." And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid (Ezra 3:10-11).*

The same kind of thing was seen later at the dedication of the rebuilt walls when Nehemiah was in charge. *"Then I brought the leaders of Judah up onto the wall and appointed two great choirs that gave thanks. One went to the south on the wall to the Dung Gate. . . The other choir of those who gave thanks went to the north, and I followed them with half of the people, on the wall, above the Tower of the Ovens, to the Broad Wall . . . So both choirs of those who gave thanks stood in the house of God, and I and half of the officials with me" (Nehemiah 12:31,38, 40).* Maybe the song at the transport of the ark did not sound like cacophony after all.

### **Praise the LORD (vv.1-9).**

Now as we turn our attention to Psalm 96, we are immediately challenged to sing to the LORD. In antiphonal fashion choir #1 would have sung "a new song." Or specifically, *Oh sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth! (v.1).*

*A new song* is not a reference to the hottest number one hit in the land, something recently published. The idea of new in this case is new quality or character as opposed to new in time. We might translate the word "different" as in "sing a different song to the LORD." Remember that the setting is bringing the ark, the symbol of God's presence into the city of God. It was a vivid display of the superiority of the true God over all the little, make-believe gods of Israel's pagan rivals and opponents.

Whatever song we would sing to God, He deserves for it to be different, distinct from what the unbelievers are singing to their gods. The entire earth is challenged to sing this distinct song. How odd that “all the earth” challenges the people of God to sing their old song in honor of God—and God’s people concede. Instead of lowering ourselves to the world’s standard, we need to challenge them to come up to ours. The quality of our songs ought to demonstrate the superiority of our God.

In reply to this sung statement by choir #1, choir #2 would have sung a “song of salvation.” *Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day (v.2)*. Our music is directed toward the LORD not toward the world or toward us. Some people argue that our songs ought to be pleasing to the world in order to attract them to the LORD. Others argue that our songs in corporate worship are intended to focus on each other’s needs.

The instruction here is that our psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:18; Col. 3:16), by which we admonish each other are to be focused on God. We are to be *singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God (Col. 3:16)*, and *singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart (Eph. 5:18)*.

While making the LORD the focus of our singing, we tell of His salvation – all the time! The great story of salvation is not that there is a weak and emotional god who wants to make life easy for you. The story of salvation is that God is mighty to save those who trust Him from eternal condemnation deserved because we have offended Him.

Then together the choirs probably sang about a song of majesty. *Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples (v.3)*! God’s glory is His abundant weightiness or worth. On one hand, no human can comprehend God’s glory, value, worth. On the other hand, we should tell what we know and encourage others to marvel with us.

To declare is to recount what we have learned or discovered. It is like an accounting term that means to give a report about how the figures add up. What have you learned about God? What has He revealed to you about Himself in His Word? How have you observed those truths working out in real life “*among all the peoples*”?

The other day I had lunch with a friend who has for many years zealously shared the gospel with people. He is a layman but he has been a serious evangelist. He was recounting to me how things have changed over the past fifty years of his practice of declaring God’s marvelous works to all of the people. How sad to learn that times have changed so that now people are quite direct to stop God’s people from telling the good news about God. In this man’s assessment, “By and large, people just don’t want to hear the message any more.” Received or not, appreciated or not, our songs should tell the wonderful stories of God’s good and great works among all people.

In the second subsection of this song (maybe we would call it stanza two), we find the reason for praising the LORD. Choir #1 would have sung that the LORD is to be feared above all gods. *For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods (v.4)*. I was thinking about writing a new song along the theme of God’s mighty power. I think I would title it, “Be Afraid, Be Very Afraid!” What makes me think that such a song would not be very popular?

I remember a long ago child’s prayer for food that went like this: “God is great, God is good, and we thank Him for this food.” God is great. But the greatness of God is more like “awesome” or “overwhelming.” One does not have to contemplate creation very long to arrive at that conclusion. A few years ago, astronomers marveled at the new discovery of a “super-void” in the universe. Apparently, there is this “hole,” a blank or empty section in space that seems to be missing about 10,000 galaxies. If you have ever studied any level of astronomy, you know that the size of one galaxy is mind-boggling. And now there seems to be 10,000 of these things missing? How can 10,000 galaxies disappear into thin air, or out of thin air as is the case here? I know who created the universe with this gaping hole, and I know that He knows exactly why He did it.

God is great. The power to imagine, design, and create such a universe is fearsome. What else can He do? He can speak entire worlds into and out of existence. That God who knows the hairs of your head (every head ever to exist) determines if and when you will take another breath. But God’s greatest greatness is displayed in His mercy to save sinners from eternal punishment.

In response to that wonderful truth, choir #2 would sing that man-made gods don't compare. *For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens (v.5)*. Pick up your idol that is like a scarecrow in a cucumber field and carry it outside and let it look at God's creation and be impressed. That sounds kind of silly, doesn't it? Putting anything or anyone in the place of God is silly indeed. Nothing we can imagine or create is of any value at all compared to God our Creator.

Together the choirs sang that the LORD is majestically beautiful. *Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary (v.6)*. The most astonishing environment is found in God's presence. We really cannot comprehend the splendor and majesty of the "celestial city" that John Bunyan talked about in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The very words are limited in meaning by our experiences. So we have visited mansions, palaces, and castles which we found impressive. Or maybe even viewed natural landscapes that literally are breathtaking. Think of the most majestic sight you have ever seen. That is not even close to what God is like.

Go to God's sanctuary. God's sanctuary is where you find Him. To step into God's sanctuary is to step into His holy presence. In fact the English word *sanctuary* used here is the Hebrew word for "holy." Picture Isaiah's vision of the LORD exalted in His temple. Picture John overwhelmed by the sight of God's throne room in heaven. God's holiness is not characterized by austerity but by strength and beauty. The problem is that our understanding of the traits of strength and beauty have been tainted by sin. Sinful people call beautiful things boring and old fashioned. Sinful people call strength weakness and weakness strength just like they put light for darkness and darkness for light.

The third stanza could have been to acknowledge the LORD's holy splendor. If so, choir #1 sang that we should ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. *Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength (v.7)*! Once we have seriously contemplated what extreme majesty and splendor looks like, ascribe that to the LORD. Every person of every nation that has ever existed would have been wise to do this. How long has it been since you have taken time to contemplate the LORD's glory and strength?

In response, choir #2 sang in similar fashion that we should ascribe to the LORD due glory. *Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts (v.8)*! All glory is due to the character of the LORD. That is what we say when we quote: *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31)*.

Here is a silly thought. Imagine sitting down quietly for a long time to think about how great God is. After recalling many statements from the Bible that reveal God's majestic glory, and after seriously contemplating the works of God's hand in creation, and after reviewing the amazing things that God does in life, you get up and say, "Okay God, here's my plan and I want you to bless it." The person who can do that certainly didn't come to accurate conclusions about God.

Together the choirs sang that we should worship in the LORD's holy splendor. *Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth (v.9)*! Again consider what worship looks like. The very word speaks of bowing in submission. When we worship, our hearts are bowed before God. A heart bowed before God is a sign of knowing who and what God is. True worship is a sign of willingness to do whatever He would desire for us to do. We should not be surprised then to discover that the words *worship* and *tremble* go together.

How do we respond when we have come to this understanding about the King of king's astonishing glory and majesty?

### **Tell the World That the King is Coming.**

Choir #1 sang that the LORD reigns as King. *Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity" (v.10)*. Human opinions notwithstanding, the LORD is King. Tell the nations that the LORD is reigning right now. Reigning is what kings do. To reign means that He makes the laws. He enforces the laws. He rewards those who love and obey Him. He punishes those who disobey Him. He will not tolerate anyone trying to take His throne.

The King rules over the world He has established. Because He has established the world, no mere person can move it. Nothing

humanity or nature can do will ever “move” the world the King established. In other words, stop worrying about nuclear warfare, asteroids, or even Martians destroying the earth. The earth will only be destroyed according to the King’s will. He, in His time, will remove the world completely and create a new one.

To this great testimony, choir #2 would sing, “Let creation praise the King.” *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 (vv.11-12).* Let creation sing! The creation does sing the glory of the LORD. Study all the amazing creation and hear it praise its Maker.

Let creation rejoice before the LORD. Notice the emphasis on the direction of our singing: *before the LORD (v.13a)*. A creation that made itself through a big bang or some other accident will never rejoice before the LORD. The creation testifies that it is the handiwork of the LORD.

In conclusion, the choirs sing together that the King comes to judge. Back in verse ten we saw, *He will judge the peoples with equity (v.10b)*. In verse thirteen, *For he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness (v.13b)*.

The LORD is the eternal judge. This is why it is wise to acknowledge the King, the Creator. He is coming to judge the earth. And when Jesus Christ the King shows up, the whole world will be shocked. Suddenly and too late the whole world will realize they have been deluded by Satan’s lie.

The LORD is also the righteous judge. At the judgment of all creatures, the creatures will accuse Christ of being unfair. Jesus taught, *On that day many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?” (Matthew 7:22)*. Notice that people will call Him Lord when by their lives they never acknowledged Him as Lord. Notice they will claim they did His work.

In reply to the sinners’ unrighteous claims, the eternal Judge will with a word affirm that His judgment is righteous. *And then will I declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness” (Matthew 7:23)*. John saw that it will be like this:

*And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done (Revelation 20:12).*

The King is reigning in majesty and glory. We who love Him will focus our praise and worship on Him. We will acknowledge His greatness by the way we live. We will desire to tell all the people of the nations about God’s splendor. We will often be despised for doing it. But in the end, when the King is the Judge who judges righteously, we will be most thankful people.