

Psalm 98

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[0 : 0 0] Church is boring. Have you ever heard that said? Have you ever thought it yourself? You don't need to admit it out loud. Have you ever said that? Church is boring. Maybe that's your current opinion. I don't know. I guess if we're being honest and trying to consider that possibility, we'd have to recognize that sometimes maybe it is, or maybe that's our experience of church. We find it boring. Now, there's a whole subject there to consider. Why? Is it because it is actually boring, the service, or is it more a problem with the one who is bored? I don't know if your mother ever said to you, it's only boring people who get bored. I don't think that's true, but I've heard it said.

But nonetheless, for many, there is a sense in which you identify with that sentiment, church is boring. Well, we've read Psalm 98. We've sung Psalm 98. And I ask you, in the light of what we've read, in the light of what we've sung, do you think that the author of the psalm considered worshiping God as boring? I don't think it would be possible to come to that conclusion. The psalm is brimming. The psalm is bursting with passion and energy and excitement and vitality and joy.

Sing to the Lord a new song. Shout for joy to the Lord. Burst into jubilant song with music. There's nothing boring about this in the mind and in the conviction of the author of the psalmist.

What I wanted to do this morning is to explore this psalm. And as we explore the psalm, and we want to look at the whole psalm, so necessarily it will be a kind of sweeping treatment of the psalm. As we do, pray that we would capture something of its passion and excitement. I think the psalm can be helpfully divided into three parts. It's not just that this is a division that I'm imposing on it, but very clearly the psalmist himself, in penning the psalm, presents to us three parts or sections to the psalm. And each of these parts of the psalm is distinguished by the identity of who is being addressed. So, in each of these parts, the audience is a different one. A call is being made, but in each part, though it's being called or the one being called is different. So, let me just explain what I mean by that. So, in verses 1 to 3, what we have is a call to God's people, very particularly. It is God's people who are being addressed in the first section of the psalm.

But then from verse 6 to verse, rather from verse 4 to verse 6, the call is broadened, and it is a call to the whole earth or to the nations. We see that there in verse 4, shout for joy to the Lord all the earth. So, it begins as a call to God's people very particularly.

[3 : 1 7] Then you have a second section where it's broadened as a call to all the earth. And then the psalm finishes with a third section where the call, rather remarkably, is to all creation. We've already pondered on how intriguing that is as we were speaking with the children. Verse 7, let the sea resound and everything in it, the world and all who live in it. Let the rivers clap their hands. Let the mountains sing together for joy. So, here we have the psalm, three parts to it.

In the first part, you have a call directed to God's people. In the second part, a call directed to the nations of the world. And in the third part, a call directed to all creation, which indeed includes all of us within it. So, let's think of it using those divisions as our guide. First of all, in verses 1 to 3, we have what we could call a call to God's people. And what is the call that is directed to God's people? Well, it's there at the very beginning of the psalm in verse 1, sing to the Lord a new song. It is a call to sing. It is a call to joyful and grateful praise, that is, to be directed to our God, to the Lord, to Yahweh, to the covenant-keeping and ever-faithful God of Israel. God's people are being called to sing the praises of their God. That much is clear. But that then leads to another question that follows from it, and that is, why are we to do so? Why are we to praise God in the manner described? Well, we're given the reason. Immediately, the psalmist gives us the reason why we are to do so. There in verse 1 again, sing to the Lord a new song, for He has done marvelous things. So, immediately, the psalmist tells us why we are to do this, why it's good to do it, why it's necessary, why it's important. Why? Because He has done marvelous things. So, our praise is grounded, or is to be grounded in a sense of wonder, in a sense of awe, in a sense of amazement, in a sense of marvel. We marvel at the marvelous things that God has done, and out of that sense of wonder and amazement erupts a praise, song directed to the author of these marvelous things. And note that this expression employed there by the author in the very beginning of the psalm, marvelous things, is an expression that we find on other occasions in the psalms and elsewhere, and it is an expression that is used exclusively of acts of God. What is being spoken of are acts of

God, the marvelous things that only God? The marvelous things that only God can do. Our God is a God of marvelous things, of marvelous deeds. That's how He rose. He is a God who does marvelous things.

Well, we can state that, but then we need to think a little bit more, or dig a little bit deeper. We need to consider what these marvelous things are. What can we say about these marvelous deeds, or marvelous things? And as we dig a little bit deeper in wanting to identify them, we can maybe help ourselves by posing three questions. First of all, what are they? What are these marvelous things that we are to sing praises to God for? What are they grounded in, or driven by? What leads God to act in this way? And then what is the impact, or the outcome, of these deeds? And all of these questions are answered in the first three verses of the psalm. First of all, then, what are they? What are these marvelous deeds? Well, they are deeds or acts of salvation. Three times in verses 1 to 3, we have these deeds identified as acts of salvation. In verse 1, His right hand and holy arm have worked salvation for Him.

Verse 2, the Lord has made His salvation known. The end of verse 3, all lions of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. So, these marvelous deeds are saving acts on the part of God, acts of deliverance, of rescue. And as the psalmist speaks of God's saving deeds, no doubt in His mind's eye, He can envisage or bring to His memory any number of occasions when God had acted to save or deliver His people from their enemies, or indeed sometimes from themselves and their own folly. The story of God's dealings with His people recorded in the pages of the Bible is punctuated time and time again by God acting in favor of His people in favor of His people and saving them. But of all the occasions the psalmist may have had in mind, one would without doubt have stood out in his mind. The deliverance of God's people from slavery and ignominy in Egypt, that particular act of salvation stood in a sense above all the others in its scale, but also in its significance. And I'm sure many of you remember the story. Or if you don't, let me just mention some of the elements of it that certainly qualify as marvelous deeds.

[8 : 58] Remember Pharaoh reluctant to let the Israelites go and how God sent these dreadful plagues in response to Pharaoh's folly. And then when the people of Israel began their journey from Egypt, the miracles that accompanied the crossing of the Red Sea, the miraculous provision of manna in the desert, and then the crossing of the Jordan to take possession of the promised land, the fall of Jericho, and we could go on, a veritable catalog of marvelous saving deeds performed by God on behalf of His people. And all by the hand of God. This is the stress of the second hand for verse 1 when we read, His right hand and His holy arm have worked salvation for Him. It is God who performs these saving acts. God doesn't delegate His saving work. When it comes to salvation, our God is a hands-on God.

He is the one who acts on behalf of His people to save them. But these marvelous deeds of God, not only can we identify them, we need to ask the question, what are they grounded in or what are they driven by? We're really asking the why question. Why does God act in this way on behalf of His people?

Well, we're given an answer to that question also. Notice what the psalmist says in verse 3. He has remembered His love and His faithfulness to the house of Israel. And when the Bible speaks of God remembering, it is invariably accompanied by action. He remembers in order to act on our behalf. And this action of God is grounded in God's very nature in His love and in His faithfulness. It is grounded in His love for His people. Why does He act? Because He loves us. Why does He rescue? Because He loves us. Why does He deliver us? Because He loves us. He loves a people who are lost. He loves a people who are oppressed and enslaved and downcast. And it is His love that serves as the motivation, if you wish, the impulse for God to exercise His power. And He loves us. And He loves us. And He loves us. And He loves us. And He has made promises to His people. And God delivers on His promises. He has promised to be with us. He has promised to accompany us. He has a promise to answer our cry for help. And He does. He delivers on His promises.

What are His marvelous deeds grounded in? Well, in His love and faithfulness. But then there's another question as we dig a little deeper or explore a little more these marvelous deeds. And it's really the question, what is the impact or outcome of these marvelous deeds of God, these saving acts? I think we can identify a threefold impact or outcome. The first is maybe obvious. It is deliverance. Deliverance for His people. Deliverance from slavery and to the promised land. If we think of that one epic act of deliverance from Egypt, it's important to see how there you have that, a model, if you wish, of how God saves. It's always twofold. It's always saving from and saving to. So He saves His people from slavery, but He saves them to or for freedom and liberty and then the promised land, the land flowing with milk and honey. And you see that same pattern time and time again, even though the circumstances may be different. So the impact of His saving deeds? Well, deliverance for His people. But also, and it's the somber other side of the coin, if you wish, defeat for His enemies. This is implicit in the language of the psalm, especially in verse 1, that word translated salvation is sometimes translated helpfully, appropriately, as victory. And of course, when God wins a victory on behalf of His people, then it necessarily involves a defeat for God's enemies, for those who have been oppressing them.

To be rescued from Egypt required the defeat of the Egyptians. Indeed, the very horrendous loss of life there in the Red Sea. So there is deliverance for God's people, but there's also defeat for His enemies. But there's another element, and one that the psalmist highlights in these first three verses, and that is the one outcome is the discovery or revelation for the nations. By these marvelous deeds, the Lord reveals Himself not only to His own people, but to the nations of the world. He reveals His righteousness, as is stated there explicitly. Verse 2, the Lord has made His salvation known, and He has revealed His righteousness to the nations. He reveals His righteousness. He reveals His saving power. And the picture is of the nations looking on in awe and wonder at God's saving acts. You know, we've thought a little bit about the rescue from Egypt, but we can fast forward some centuries to the return from exile in Babylon. And listen to what the psalmist has to say in that regard. And we only need to turn a few pages to Psalm 126 and verses 1 and 2. And what does it say there about the nations looking on in wonder? Psalm 126, when the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Well, all that is to be expected, but then what does it say? Then it was said among the nations, the Lord has done great things for them. The Lord has done great things for them. The nations are looking on. The Babylonians are looking on. The Persians are looking on. The Egyptians are looking on. The Syrians are looking on. They're saying, wow, look at what God has done for them. And so these acts of, these marvelous deeds have as their outcome not only the deliverance of God's people, not only defeat for God's enemy, but there is for the nations the opportunity to discover who God is. God reveals Himself to them by His saving deeds, by His marvelous deeds. Well, let's just pause for a moment and consider what the psalmist says in these verses from the vantage point of today as we look back and contemplate saving acts that are subsequent to the writing of the writing of this psalm, in the unrolling of God's saving mission. What is God's most marvelous deed? What is God's most astounding act of salvation? Well, the clue is in the word salvation here in these three verses, or in the Hebrew, Yeshua. The very word salvation gives us the clue.

[16:17] The very word points us in the direction of God's most amazing and remarkable saving act. It points us in the direction of Jesus, for Yeshua is the Jewish way to say Jesus, the Hebrew way to say Jesus.

Jesus is God's ultimate saving act. God the Father sent His only Son, Yeshua, to save His people, to save them, not from an oppressive world power, be that the Egyptians or the Babylonians or the Romans, but to save them from themselves, from their slavery to sin and their bondage to self. Jesus came into the world to save sinners, to save you and me. He came into the world to live a perfect life in our place, to die a sinner's death in our stead. So the very word salvation points to Jesus, but there are other striking pointers to the coming of Messiah Jesus in the language of the psalm. Most strikingly, when the psalmist speaks of God's love and faithfulness there in verse 3, He has remembered His love and His faithfulness, His grace and truth. What does the apostle John say at the beginning of his gospel about

Jesus? I think words that are familiar to many of us. John chapter 1 and verse 14, He's speaking about Jesus. And what does He say? He says, the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. And the words there, grace and truth, are the Greek equivalents to the two Hebrew words here in verse 3, love and faithfulness, or grace and truth. And so in the coming of Jesus, God has most eloquently and most powerfully revealed, demonstrated His grace and His truth. Indeed, in the coming of Jesus, picking up on the themes of the psalm, God has also most eloquently revealed His righteousness in the person of Jesus, the altogether righteous one, in the work of Jesus, righteously dealing with sin and its consequences.

And so we have in this first section of the psalm this call to God's people, this call to God's people. And it is because of these marvelous saving deeds that we are called to sing a new song. And the call is to you, the call is to us, to sing to the Lord a new song. And so I pose the question, are you singing?

But let's move on and consider just a little bit more briefly the second section of the psalm, where the call is directed not to God's people in the first instance, but it is broadened and it is directed to the whole earth. Shout for joy to the Lord all the earth, we read there in verse 4. The call in verses 1 to 3 is to Israel, to God's people, it is those who have been saved, the blessed beneficiaries of God's marvelous deeds. It is to believers, to those who follow and trust in Yeshua the Savior.

[19 : 38] But what is the place occupied by the Gentile nations, by the enemies of God, by those who do not belong to His family? Are such people destined to permanently occupy the place of defeated foes?

Is that their destiny? That's who they are. They are the defeated ones. Or perhaps at best, they can occupy the place of awestruck witnesses to God's marvelous deeds, much as we read there in Psalm 126. The nations looking on and declaring the Lord has done great things for them, not for us, for them. Either defeated foes or awestruck witnesses, nothing more. Is that their place?

Condemned to look on from afar in amazement, but never able to belong to God's people? Well, by no means. You see, they too, the nations of the world, they too are invited to the party. All are invited to the party. The defeated enemies are invited to the party. The awestruck observers are invited to the party. Shout for joy to the Lord. All the earth burst into jubilant song with music. This is a call to the nations, to every man, woman, and child from every tribe, people, and language. This is a call to conversion or an invitation to embrace the Lord as God and King. This is a call to those who follow false gods or know God at all to throw in their lot with the living and true God.

I wonder if those who burst into jubilant song do so at the startling realization that they too can join the party. It's as if they hear the invitation and their response is, what? Me too? I'm invited too?

And yes, you are. You too. You're all invited. We're all invited. Whoever you are, wherever you're from, whatever you've done or left undone, you are invited to the party. And so, will you answer the call to sing?

[21 : 51] And notice that the psalmist contemplates the new arrivals, the incomers, if you wish, participating fully in the festival life of the community. Notice there in verses 4 to 6, especially the reference to the blasting of the ram's horn. You see, the nations of the world are invited to participate, to participate in the festivals of Israel. That in itself is a remarkable thing.

You know, to participate in the temple worship with the harp and the sound of singing, and then also with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn. And of all the possibilities there, let's just focus in on this invitation to the nations to blow the horn, to participate in the blast of the ram's horn.

What significance is there in that? Well, the ram's horn in Israel was used to announce some great occasion. For example, the year of Jubilee, when all debts were canceled, was announced by a blast of the ram's horn.

You can read about that in Leviticus chapter 25. Or the enthronement of a new king would be announced with the blast of a ram's horn. And the psalmist invites the nations of the world to blow the horn in celebration.

How can they be involved in such an activity? How can they be part of announcing the enthronement of a king for Israel? How can that be? Well, this can only be fully understood as a prophetic anticipation of the coming of Messiah Jesus.

[23 : 31] It points forward to Jesus. It anticipates with expectant joy the coming of the one who would, by his death, cancel every debt of sin.

It anticipates with expectant joy the coming of the king, King Jesus, the king of the universe, the king who would establish his kingdom, not by the sword, but by the cross.

And so the nations of the world are invited to celebrate the coming of the king. And it was with the coming of Jesus that the door belonging to the household of God's family, always ajar in the Old Testament, was flung open to the nations.

In the book of Isaiah, the prophet, we are made privy to words addressed by God the Father to his Son as he anticipates his saving work.

In chapter 49 and in verse 6, these are the words addressed to the coming Messiah. And so Jesus comes to make reality what is pointed forward to in these words of joyful call to the nations of the world to bow before the living and true God.

[25 : 02] And so the question that is posed to us is will we answer the call to sing? We are, I think, in our vast majority, perhaps all of us, I don't know, members of the Gentile nations.

We're not members of the ancient people of Israel. And to us this call is extended. Of course, the first verses are also extended to us as the people of God.

But this call extended to the nations of the world. You don't need to content yourself with looking on from the outside. You can come and join the party.

Shout for joy to the Lord and burst into jubilant song. But what is the spring from whence gushes such praise? Well, the joy of forgiveness, the blessing of belonging, the delight of adoption into God's family.

What do you need to do? You need to bow down before King Jesus. You need to joyfully submit to Him as your King. Trust in Him as your Savior.

[26 : 07] And so the psalm continues in this second part with this call to the nations of the world. But it concludes with a third call, and that is a call directed to all creation.

In verses 7 to 9. Now, the language of the psalmist in this final section of the psalm appears to become almost mythical.

Or the language of fantasy as creation is personified and joins in the dance of praise and jubilation. The sea resounds.

The rivers clap. The mountains sing. Tolkien's novels seem tame in comparison to the pictures that are being painted by the psalmist here of creation itself joining in the celebration.

And so I say the language seems almost mythical, almost the language of fantasy. But this is no fantasy. You see, the psalmist, as he pens this final part of the psalm, he's no longer looking back in history to God's marvelous saving deeds.

[27 : 13] He's not recalling all that God has done for His people. Thinking back to Egypt. Thinking back to the Exodus. Thinking back to the many occasions when God intervened on behalf of His people.

He's not looking back now. The psalmist now is looking forward. He's anticipating something that has yet to occur. He's looking forward in history to the consummation of God's saving mission.

He's looking forward to the coming of the King to judge the earth. And so the question for us to ponder on is, what is this coming that he sees and writes about with a prophetic eye?

To what coming is he referring? Well, he's referring, it seems to me, to the coming of Jesus. Seen as one event. Because we live in between, as it were, the first coming of Jesus and His second coming.

That very fact that in history that's where we are. We find it very difficult to think of them as anything other than very distinct events. But from the big picture of eternity.

[28 : 27] The coming of Jesus is one great event. And that one great event involved His incarnation. His first coming. And also involves His second coming.

And I think here the psalmist, in the measure that he was able to comprehend, even what he writes, has in his mind this one great event of the coming of Messiah.

His coming into the world as a babe at Christmas. And His still future return in glory. And the focus in the language of this section certainly is on His coming to judge.

He will judge the world in righteousness and the people with equity. For He comes to judge the earth. But as we acknowledge that that is the focus of this section, we need to be careful not to draw too sharp a distinction between His saving and His judging.

Judgment is, in a very real sense, one aspect of God's saving work. You think of the historic acts of salvation.

[29 : 41] The Exodus was an act of salvation. But it was also an act of judgment. The first coming of Jesus was primarily, and in the first instance, an act of salvation.

But it was also an act of judgment. Salvation for those who embrace Him, and judgment for those who reject Him. And the second coming of Jesus will also be both to save and to judge.

There is also maybe just one other thing to know, a further aspect to the language the psalmist uses here, of the Messiah coming to judge.

And that is that He comes to judge in the sense of He comes to rule. You see, this judgment that the psalmist speaks about is not just about a day of judgment.

There is such a day. That day is coming. The day has been fixed. But it's not just about the day. This language of the king coming to judge is the language of a king coming to rule.

[30 : 45] It's about the inauguration of His eternal and visible rule over the new heavens and the new earth. And that too is part of His great saving act.

The king is coming. Jesus is coming to judge the earth. Jesus is coming to inaugurate and rule over the new heavens and the new earth.

And so the question that we need to grapple with is this. Are we ready? Are you ready? Will you on that day when He comes, will you join with the mountains in singing for joy?

Or will you, in terror, call out to the mountains to cover you? Well, if you do, they won't come to your aid because they're too busy singing.

And so now is the day of salvation. Now is the time to enjoy salvation. To embrace the Savior. To trust in Jesus.

[31 : 46] Now is the opportunity to trust in Him. And so be ready for that great and awful day when He returns to judge the world. May we all be ready.

May we all know what it is to embrace Jesus, to trust in Him, and to follow Him. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your Word. We thank You that You are indeed the God who does marvelous things.

We thank You that we can look back in history and see how throughout history you are ever active on behalf of Your people.

We do thank You most especially for the most extraordinary saving deed on behalf of Your people. And the sending of Your own Son, Jesus, to be our Savior.

We thank You that in Jesus we see the grace and truth of God. We thank You that in Jesus is revealed Your righteousness. And we thank You that in Jesus we have one who is a sufficient Savior for sinners such as we are.

[32 : 53] And so we do pray that You would be the one helping us to trust in Him, to ever trust in Him, to ever seek to follow Him and serve Him. And we pray these things in His name.
Amen.