

Psalm 47 is a fitting response to the victory of God described in Psalm 46. The Lord Almighty makes wars to cease, breaks the bow, and shatters the spear, and as a result the Lord is exalted among the nations. All the nations are invited to “come and see what the Lord has done” (Ps 46:8). All the peoples of the earth are commanded to “stop” their opposition and submit to the Lord who is “exalted in the earth” (Ps 46:10). Psalm 47 is the Lord’s gospel invitation to all people to approach his throne with uninhibited joy. It is a call to the nations to embrace this life-giving reality in one accord. The psalmist centers reality around the throne of God and teaches us how to worship *today* in view of the future consummation of God’s rule and reign.

This praise song is an ascension psalm divided in two parallel stanzas with a single unified message. The historical setting for Psalm 47 may have been when David brought up the ark of God into Jerusalem. David took off his royal robes and wearing only a linen ephod he danced before the Lord with all his might. All Israel joined him “with shouts and the sound of trumpets” (2 Sam 6:15). The ascendancy of the ark of the covenant into the City of Zion may serve “as a figure and type of the Lord’s entry into the heavenly Jerusalem.”¹ Psalm 47 points forward to when the God who “raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way” (Eph 1:20-23).

The Whole World Rejoices

*Clap your hands, all you nations [peoples];
shout to God with cries of joy.
For the Lord Most High is awesome,
the great King over all the earth.
He subdued nations [tribes] under us,
peoples under our feet.
He chose our inheritance for us,
the pride of Jacob, whom he loved.
God has ascended amid shouts of joy,
the Lord amid the sounding of trumpets.*

Psalm 47:1-5

Our first impression is that the psalmist is calling for enthusiastic applause and loud praise.² But another view holds that the Hebrew idiom means “to strike hands.” If this is the case, the psalm is calling for the nations to come together and “shake hands” in agreement that the Lord Most High is “the great King over all the earth.”³ This acknowledgment is based on the fact that

¹ Reardon, *Christ in the Psalms*, 91

² Goldingay, *Psalms*, 77; Ross, *Psalms*, 108.

³ Wright, *Psalms*, vol.1, 726.

Israel's God, Yahweh, is the universal, sovereign ruler of all peoples. He alone has elected Israel through whom to bless and subdue the nations. This international agreement and acclamation is not made grudgingly, but enthusiastically. The ascendancy of God is celebrated with cries of joy and the sounding of trumpets.

Psalm 47 fulfills destiny of the nations (Genesis 10), celebrates the great reversal of the scattering of the nations at the infamous Tower of Babel (Genesis 11), and builds upon the blessing of Abraham through whom "all peoples on earth will be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). This psalm celebrates the redemptive inheritance that is promised throughout salvation history. The exclusivity of God's election of Israel has always meant the inclusiveness of God's blessing to the nations.⁴ From the beginning, God's design has been for the "pride of Jacob" and Israel's place on the world stage, to be "a light for the Gentiles," that his "salvation may reach to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6). The prophet Isaiah captured the meaning of the psalmist when he wrote, "Kings will see you and stand up, princes will see and bow down, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you" (Isaiah 49:7).

All the redemptive promises celebrated in Psalm 47, the universal rule of God, the inheritance pledged to Israel, and the pride of Jacob, find their fulfillment in Israel's representative, Jesus Christ. The apostles echo the themes of this psalm in revelatory ways that clarify the means God chose to bring about his salvation. If it was scandalous for God to choose a little beleaguered nation through whom to bless the nations, how much more to choose one man, Jesus, the Son of Man, the Incarnate One. It is through him that we have been given new birth into a "living hope," into "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade . . . ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:4-5). The ascended Lord Jesus, enthroned in heaven, awaits that coming day when "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10-11). The author of Hebrews wrote, "In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. But we see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone" (Heb 2:8-9).

The apostle John's vision of the heavenly throne corresponds to the psalmist's vision of God seated on his holy throne. Every tribe, language, people, and nation are invited into the presence of God. Everyone is called out of the closed universe of their own making and into the large world of God's creation and redemption. The worship scene in Revelation is as exuberant as it is exalted (Rev 4:1-11). "The scene is marked by a tremendous dynamism, an energy that flows first of all centripetally" toward the throne of God and then centrifugally away from the throne and into the world.⁵ The apostle John's horizon is as broad and as wide-angled as the psalmist. The scope of the heavenly vision is simultaneously personal and cosmic. His Spirit-inspired praying imagination is stretched to the limit. There is nothing narrow and individualistic about this description. Like the psalmist John is caught up into something grander and more real than

⁴ Kider, *Psalms*, 177. Kidner writes: "The phrase, 'Jacob whom he loves,' may provoke the question, 'Why?' – which is equally unanswerable whether the object of the love is 'Jacob' or 'me' or 'the church' or 'the world' (cf. Gal 2:20; Eph 5:25; John 3:16)."

⁵ Mangina, *Revelation*, 75.

himself. We may be surprised to learn how deeply the heavenly throne of God affirms creation and culture. We too easily forget that “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” (John 3:16). The encircling rainbow, the global church (twenty-four elders), the release of energy – “flashes of lightning, rumblings, and peals of thunder” – the sea of glass, the four living creatures, and the first two praise anthems, emphasize the totality of God’s holiness and the worthiness of his sovereignty over all creation.⁶

The Inclusive Gospel

*Sing praises to God, sing praises;
sing praises to our King, sing praises.
For God is the King of all the earth;
sing to him a psalm of praise.
God reigns over the nations;
God is seated on his holy throne.
The nobles of the nations [peoples] assemble
as the people of the God of Abraham,
for the kings of the earth belong to God;
he is greatly exalted.*

Psalm 47:6-9

Living as we do in the “global village” and in the age of choice it is popular to believe that there are many ways to God. When Prince Charles was questioned about religion, he said that when he becomes king, he would rather inherit the title, ‘Defender of Faith,’ instead of ‘Defender of the Faith’ and so represent all his subjects.⁷ One of the heroes of the twentieth century, Mahatma Gandhi, offered his conclusion to the matter in an essay entitled *All Religions Are True*. He concluded that The Eternal One is perceived differently in different cultures, because whatever we mean by “God” exceeds the scope of human thought, language and experience.

The apostles clearly understood the absolute claim of Jesus as Lord. They declared, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). The early church was convinced that Jesus was the revelation of God, the culmination of a long history of revelation, the very self-disclosure of God. The exclusive truth of the gospel fits with the purpose of God's promise from the beginning. God chose one, small, weak, insignificant nation through which to make himself known and bless the world. The exclusiveness of the gospel is consistent with the character of revelation and the nature of God's own self-disclosure.

There are not many gods to know, as the Canaanites or the Greeks or Hindus believed, but only one God. All the rest are idols. Neither is god a vague abstraction; a nameless, undefined, indistinguishable being or force or feeling or projection. God's self-disclosure is more definite, definable, specific and singular than we can fully grasp – more than we can completely

⁶ Webster, *Follow the Lamb*, 121.

⁷ The San Diego Union-Tribune, 7/1/1994.

comprehend, not less! If we consider any distinctiveness or uniqueness to our personhood, should God, the very Author of Life, the Maker of the Universe receive less. If our sense of self recoils at the notion of being just one of the masses, we can be assured that the Lord God is no less the Person that we are. There is in fact only one you! And there is in truth only one God! The Word of God declares, "I am the Lord your God...You shall have no other gods before me...You shall not make for yourself an idol..."(Ex.20:3-4). "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deut.6:4-5).

The apostles believed that the promise of God given to Abraham, "all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you," is fulfilled in Jesus. And each subsequent stage of salvation history, from Moses to the Prophets, from Jeremiah to David, anticipated the Savior; not an ethnic Savior, not a cultural religion, not a tribal deity, but the Savior of the world (Jn.3:16). As the author of Hebrews wrote, "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven" (Hebrews 1:1-3).

The exclusive truth claim of the gospel is consistent with the universal scope of the gospel. Religious and cultural pluralism is certainly not a new phenomenon. In the first century Roman milieu, the early church experienced radical diversity and tolerance in much the same way we do, except the early church was bold in announcing that the gospel was meant for all people everywhere. They took the command of Jesus seriously: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Mt.28:19-20). The early Christians were "not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (Romans 1:16-17). The exclusive truth of the gospel was not meant to exclude, but include. As the apostle Paul said, "This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth"(1 Tim.2:3-4).

With its "one throne, one world" theme, Psalm 47 puts an exclamation mark on the meaning of salvation history.⁸ "The people of the God of Abraham" are drawn from every tribe, language, people and nation (Rev 5:9). Under the highly exalted rule of God they will become one people: the redeemed sons and daughters of Adam, the children of Abraham, and brothers and sisters in Christ. However, the gospel path to this new creation involves "the unexpected kind of 'exaltation' which will begin the process of 'gathering' the peoples: 'I, when I am lifted up . . . , will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32).⁹

⁸ Kidner, Psalms, 178.

⁹ Kidner, Psalms, 178.

