

Psalm 117 leads us from the Jesus' upper room discourse and his atoning sacrifice (Ps 116) to his exaltation and glorification, when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:10-11). Psalm 117 concludes the Hallel sequence of psalms (Ps 111-116) with an appeal for universal praise. "This tiny psalm is great in faith," writes Derek Kidner, "and its reach is enormous."<sup>1</sup> The psalmist frames his exhortation to praise the Lord for his love and faithfulness in the broadest possible way. Everybody is called to praise. Every tribe, people group, and language is summoned to extol the Lord. Every nation is *commanded* to praise. For the shortest psalm in Jesus' Prayer Book it may be one of the most controversial psalms because of its radical inclusiveness – all nations and peoples, and its radical exclusiveness – one Lord.

The call to praise the Lord extends to the Gentile nations, fulfilling the promise given to Abram, "and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen 12:3). The gospel is as exclusive as it is inclusive. One of the most famous and most controversial lines of the gospel is Jesus' one liner: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). And within weeks of the Jesus' resurrection Peter declared to the Jewish religious leaders, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which you must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Jesus called his disciples to, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations," but the inclusiveness of the gospel was predicated on the exclusiveness of the truth, "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" (Matthew 28:19-20).

#### Doxology

Praise the Lord, all you nations;  
 extol him, all you peoples.  
 For great is his love toward us,  
 and faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.  
 Praise the Lord [Hallelujah].

Psalm 117:1-2

The people of God are often called to praise the Lord, but here all the nations are urged to extol the Lord (see Pss 6, 96). The psalm corresponds to Daniel's vision of "one like a son of man" who was given "authority, glory and sovereign power" and "all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him" (Dan 7:14). The synonymous parallelism of "nations" and "peoples" stresses "the real fact" that the whole world will acknowledge the Lord as King of kings and Lord of lords.<sup>2</sup> In the Book of Revelation a four stanza Hallelujah! anthem proceeds a description of the one called Faithful and True, who will rule with an iron scepter (Ps 2:9) and his name is "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev 19:16).

The psalmist's exhortation to worship the Lord recognizes the world of the nations. This is not an

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<sup>1</sup> Kidner, Psalms, 411.

<sup>2</sup> Goldingay, Psalms, 350.

“undifferentiated world” but a world of “separate political and ethnic entities.”<sup>3</sup> And each national entity and each ethnicity is being called to worship the one and only Lord. The implications of this for evangelism and worship are significant. It takes a caring gospel-centered church to communicate the unchanging gospel in ways that are ethnographically sensitive.

When we gather together to worship the Lord, the enormity of the psalmist’s claim may be missed or misconstrued by unsuspecting believers. It is easy in the secular age to be conditioned to think that each person or group of people have the right to determine for themselves what is true. But amidst the world’s many gods and ideologies there is only one God and this God is not a vague abstraction or mysterious force. If we consider our own personal identity as distinct and unique, how can we deny any less to the Author of Life and the Maker of the Universe. The Lord 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). Psalm 117 celebrates the inclusiveness of the exclusive gospel by leading us in worship. To sing this truth is no less radical than to preach it. We tend to attribute the offense of the gospel only to preaching and proclamation, but the psalmist encourages us to sing our theology and pray our conviction.

The reason all the peoples of the world and all the nations glorify the living God is because of his great love and because of his everlasting faithfulness. “The claim of the Christian community,” writes Leslie Newbigin, “is that in Jesus the absolute truth has been made present amid the relativities of human cultures, and the form which this truth took was not that of dominance and imperial power but that of one who was without power, or—rather—whose power was manifest in weakness and suffering.”<sup>4</sup> Believers confess, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes; first to the Jew, then to the Gentile” (Rom 1:16). We share the apostle’s hope and enthusiasm for the universal appeal of the gospel: “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; let all the peoples extol him” (Rom 15:11; see Ps 117:1). And we sing with Charles Wesley,

O for a thousand tongues to sing,  
My great Redeemer’s praise,  
The glories of my God and King,  
The triumphs of his grace.  
My gracious Master and my God,  
Assist me to proclaim,  
To spread through all the earth abroad,  
The honors of thy name.

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<sup>3</sup> Goldingay, Psalms, 350.

<sup>4</sup> Leslie Newbigin, The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society, 163.