

Each psalm in this sequence of enthronement psalms (Psalms 93-100) forms an intricate mosaic picturing the beauty and majesty of Yahweh's reign. These inspiring kingship psalms play a vital role in energizing the worship and mission of the people of God, because they take seriously the truth that the Lord Jesus Christ is our Savior and our King. We so easily forget this fact. We either live like little masters of the universe or like puny pawns, even though we are invited to worship the King "in the splendor of his holiness" (Ps 96:9).

We are called to "kneel before the Lord our Maker, for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care" (Ps 95:6-7). Jesus, King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:16), is the sovereign Lord. He is robed in majesty (Ps 93:1), the Judge of the earth, who avenges the righteous (Ps 94:2). He is the Rock of our salvation, the great King above all gods (Ps 95:1, 3). The whole earth is shouting for joy to the Lord and the people of God are declaring "his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples" (Ps 96:2,3). We were meant to feel the energy and passion of these psalms as they proclaim and celebrate the complete salvation and righteous judgment of the Lord.

Psalm 98 is all about praise from beginning to end – exuberant praise. Three stanzas of equal length call the saved to celebrate, musicians to burst into jubilant song, and all of creation to resound in praise. In each stanza the psalmist emphasizes the totality of praise. The mission to praise is universal. Yahweh's faithfulness to Israel means that "all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God." The whole earth shouts for joy to the Lord and all the creatures who live in it are invited to sing before the Lord. Psalm 98 emphasizes the Spirit-inspired synergy between worship and mission.

Celebrate Salvation

*Sing to the Lord a new song,
for he has done marvelous things;
his right hand and his holy arm
have worked salvation for him.
The Lord has made his salvation known
and revealed his righteousness to the nations.
He has remembered his love
and his faithfulness to Israel;
all the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.*

Psalm 98:1-3

The psalmist affirms that the leading edge of evangelism is powerful, adrenaline triggering worship. Salvation is something we sing about, not just talk about. The meaning of salvation in Psalm 98 is the Lord's supernatural, single-handed deliverance from evil and the victory of his righteousness. Salvation is entirely the work of God and his "marvelous deeds" are judgment and

justice (see Isa 59:15-20). Yahweh's work of salvation gains specificity and "sharper definition" in the revelation of Jesus Christ, "For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy" (Heb 10:14).¹ In his sermon on Psalm 98 Augustine left no doubt as to the identity of the Savior: "This right hand, this very arm, this very salvation, is our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom it is said, 'And all flesh shall see the salvation of God' (Luke 3:6)."²

Praise is the proclamation of salvation's most effective medium and most compelling argument. If we were only thinking beings or believing beings, then straight-forward didactic teaching might be all that is necessary to carry out the mission of the church, but we are more than rational creatures. We are loving, feeling, emotional creatures and it shows in how we embrace the truth and joy of salvation. "If you cannot express your joy, shout!" encouraged Augustine. "Let the shout manifest your joy, if your speech cannot: yet let not joy be mute; let not your heart be silent respecting its God, let it not be mute concerning His gifts."³

Salvation inspires a new song, because the Lord's "holy arm" has "worked salvation" we are eager to praise him in song. Music is one of the special ways the Lord chooses to make his salvation known and evangelistic worship contributes to the global mission of the Church. The psalmist and the apostle are in agreement on the mission of the church. Making salvation known and revealing the Lord's righteousness is not a duty or a burden imposed on others, but a joyous privilege.

It is possible that Psalm 98 with its emphasis on commending the salvation of our God to all the ends of the earth had an impact on the apostle Paul's approach to missions. Roland Allen in his classic study of Paul's missionary methods writes, "It seems strange to us that there should be no exhortations to missionary zeal in the Epistles of St Paul. There is one sentence of approval, 'The Lord's message rang out from you' (1 Thess 1:8), but there is no insistence upon the command of Christ to preach the gospel."⁴ Remarkably, this one sentence from Paul's early letter to the church at Thessalonica is consistent with the tenor and tone of Psalm 98. Missionary statesman Leslie Newbigin agrees, when he writes,

"There has been a long tradition which sees the mission of the Church primarily as obedience to a command. It has been customary to speak of 'the missionary mandate.' This way of putting the matter is certainly not without justification, and yet it seems to me that it misses the point. It tends to make mission a burden rather than a joy, to make it part of the law rather than part of the gospel. If one looks at the New Testament evidence one gets another impression. Mission begins with a kind of explosion of joy. The news that the rejected and crucified Jesus is alive is something that cannot possibly be suppressed. It must be told. Who could be silent about such a fact?"⁵

¹ Kidner, Psalms, 352.

² Augustine, Psalms, 481.

³ Augustine, Psalms, 482.

⁴ Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's Or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 93.

⁵ Leslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 116.

Not only does Paul's "explosion of joy" correspond to Psalm 98, but the largeness of his full-orbed gospel for the nations relates well to the wide-angled eschatological vision of the psalm. Paul's gospel of grace is the culmination of salvation history and the testimony of the Lord's "faithfulness to Israel" (Ps 98:3). This is the gospel that reveals the Lord's "righteousness to the nations" and the "salvation of our God" to "all the ends of the earth" (Ps 98:2-3).

Jubilant Evangelism

*Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth,
burst into jubilant song with music;
make music to the Lord with the harp,
with the harp and the sound of singing,
with trumpets and the blasts of the ram's horn –
shout for joy before the Lord, the King.*

Psalm 98:4-6

Music has been called the universal language because of its ability to transcend cultural barriers. The psalmist calls for choral music and string instruments like the harp and the guitar and wind instruments like trumpets and horns to praise the Lord.⁶ Music is an important medium for revealing the Lord's righteousness to the nations. Melody, harmony, rhythm, and tone are not human inventions.⁷ David credited his music ability to God. "He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God" (Ps 40:3). Israel's priests gave God the credit for the song they sang. "By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life" (Ps 42:8).

Music belongs to God the Chief Musician, whose acoustical world resonates with song because God designed not only the voice and ear, but the heart and spirit. Whatever creativity we express comes from God the Creator who not only inspires the praise but gives us the gifts with which to express his praise. The prophet Zephaniah challenged the people of God to sing, "Sing, O Daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart." The reason they could sing was because God rejoiced over them in song. "The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing" (Zeph 3:14-17).

The story of the people of God is not only spoken but sung. The prophet Isaiah described God's love in a love song. "I will sing to the one I love a song about his vineyard" (Isa 5:1). Jesus sang with his disciples, such as the time he sang a hymn with them at the Last Supper (Mt 26:30); and according to the author of Hebrews, he continues to sing, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises" (Heb 2:12). To be filled with the Spirit of God is to sing and make music in our hearts to the Lord (Eph 5:19-20).

⁶ Cyril Okorocho, *Africa Bible Commentary: Psalms*, 704. Augustine, *Psalms*, 481-482. Augustine has an interesting allegorical interpretation of the brass trumpets and ram's horns. Brass trumpets are hammered out of brass to produce a "sweet sound" and courageous worshipers are hammered out of tribulation and suffering. Rams horns rise above the body of the animal and the desires of true worshipers rise above the flesh. "He who wishes to be a horn trumpet, let him overcome the flesh."

⁷ Webster, *The Living Word*, 106-107.

Music tells God's great salvation history story in song. The dramatic turning points and breakthroughs in God's revelation are marked by hymns of praise. Prose gives way to poetry and dialogue to doxology. Narrative becomes declarative in anthems of praise. The Exodus is marked by the Song of Moses (Ex 15). The birth of Christ is celebrated in Mary's Magnificat (Lk 1:46-55), Zechariah's Benedictus (Lk 1:67-79), and in the Song of Simeon (Lk 2:29-32). Angels offer up an exclamation of praise in the Gloria (Lk 2:14). The song of salvation was in the confession and praise of Christ in the early church. His humility and exaltation is celebrated in Paul's letter to the believers at Philippi in what is thought to be an early worship hymn (Phil 2:6-11). Early Christians confessed in song, "He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory" (1 Tim 3:16).

Creation's Orchestrated Praise

*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;
let them sing before the Lord,
for he comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples with equity.*

Psalm 98:7-9

All of creation is excited about the Lord's coming from the oceans to the earth, and from the rivers to the mountains. Environmentalists should be pleased with this whole earth picture that encompasses every creature and plant in the sea and on land. Nature is not alone and independent but is in fact the creative expression of God's handiwork. Truth unites what the modern experience divides. We can neither live well nor do science well without the meaning inherent in life. Worship is both devotional and scientific. It is devotional as it deepens our devotion to God, and it is scientific as it deepens our understanding of God's creation. In fifth grade, my son memorized a dictionary definition of science: "Science is the observation, identification, description, experimental investigation, and theoretical explanation of natural phenomena." This fits worship well, because both theology and science are revelatory—both begin with God. Nature alone—life extracted from God—is only a figment of the modern imagination. The basic myth that postulates meaninglessness in order to do science is an irrational contradiction that deserves to be exposed as a modern heresy.

The apostles emphasized whole-earth-salvation. The promise of salvation includes creation care, which is the respect and care for the environment intended by her Creator. The prophets and apostles look forward to a full restoration of creation in the new heaven and the new earth (Gen 2:15; Isa 65:17; Rev 21:1). Paul wrote, "For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subject to frustration, not by its own choice,

but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:20-21).

Psalm 98 celebrates the coming of the Lord. Those who are saved by the strong arm of the Lord will use every available instrument to praise the Lord. They will proclaim this “new song” to “all the ends of the earth” and all of creation will “burst into jubilant song with music.” The apostle Paul felt this all encompassing praise when he prayed to the Father (πατέρα) “from whom all families (πατριὰ) in heaven and on earth derive their name” (Eph 3:14). Paul prayed for everyone to come to know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. He emphasized the inclusiveness of the exclusive gospel of grace.

Augustine concluded his sermon on Psalm 98 by comparing two kinds of people. Those who resist and those who welcome the Lord’s coming to “judge the world in righteousness” (Ps 98:9). Augustine asked his hearers to examine themselves and to ask themselves whether they were hard of heart or soft of heart; whether they were resistant to the Lord’s coming or receptive to his coming. To the receptive, Augustine said, “Even now rejoice that He will come. For you are a Christian!” And when you pray, “Your kingdom come,” remember to prepare yourself for Christ’s coming so you do not pray against yourself.⁸

⁸ Augustine, Psalms, 483.