

Praying the Psalms should be like speaking our mother tongue, but if we're honest praying the psalms feels more like speaking a foreign language. A missionary friend and his young family returned home from France for a summer sabbatical. The entire family had difficulty speaking English, because they had vowed four years earlier to speak only French. They were committed to learning the language; consequently, not one word of English. But upon their return home, after keeping their vow for four years, everyone in the family struggled. Their mother tongue felt like a foreign language.

To neglect the Psalms is like refusing to speak our mother tongue. Deep down we have a sense that the Psalms ought to resonate with our souls, but we feel disconnected. We try to access the Psalms the way we look for a Hallmark greeting card. We want a verse that shows we care, a thought that expresses our feelings. We go to the Psalms the way we go to the medicine cabinet to get an aspirin. It is at such times that we wish the Psalms were better organized and indexed to somehow make them more accessible.

In *Deceived by God? A Journey Through Suffering*, theologian John Feinberg honestly admits that his extensive study of the problem of evil did little to comfort him when his wife, Patricia, was diagnosed with Huntington's Disease. This genetically transmitted disease involves the premature deterioration of the brain. During seminary, Feinberg wrote his master of divinity thesis on Job. Later, he devoted his master of theology thesis to God's sovereignty and human freedom. Still absorbed in the problem of evil, he focused his doctoral dissertation on the subject.

Yet after all of those years of serious biblical and theological study, he felt as though he had no resource to help him deal with the devastating reality of his wife's life threatening illness. All of his intellectual work had missed his soul. He was speaking a foreign language. "The truth is," Feinberg admits, "I couldn't figure it out. I had all the intellectual answers, but none of them made any difference in how I felt on the personal level. As a professor of theology, surely I should understand what God was doing in this situation. On the contrary, I began wondering if in fact I really understood anything at all about God. The emotional and psychological pain was unrelenting, and even devastating physical pain resulted from the stress . . . I was experiencing a religious crisis, and none of this information I had stored away seemed to matter in the least."<sup>1</sup>

What makes Feinberg's book on pain especially worthwhile is his courage to contrast his own spiritual helplessness with his wife's deeply internalized faith. Patricia describes her initial reaction to the bad news: "I was extremely shocked when this disease was diagnosed. I knew that when physical problems come, one should thank God for his presence and strength in the midst of those problems, rather than becoming bitter. And I knew that I should do that whether I felt like it or not; so that's what I did on the way home in the car. I also knew 1 Thessalonians 5:18, which says, 'Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.' No matter what the circumstances, God is still there, and he is in control of all that happens. He is faithful to his Word. That is reason for thanksgiving, and I continue to thank him

---

<sup>1</sup> Feinberg, *Deceived By God?* 33-34.

each day.”<sup>2</sup>

One of the first things that Patricia did was to read through the Psalms. She wrote down every reference having to do with God’s strength in time of trouble. Psalm 46:1 was especially comforting: “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” Through prayer, Patricia was able to hear the Word of God in her pain. She wrote, “God made that verse true in my life. I have confidence in his presence, even in the midst of this disease.”<sup>3</sup> She found her voice in the Psalms. She was able to line up the Psalms with her life, finding in them a resource for living. Instead of being crushed by her terminal illness, she testified, “The Lord has given me such complete comfort that I wanted to find ways to share it with others.”<sup>4</sup>

Patricia Feinberg’s ability to process her experience through the Psalms started with a learned conviction. Her personal narrative was shaped by God’s redemptive story. She had a history with God and the people of God before this tragic turn of events. Her practice of the spiritual disciplines did not happen automatically. They were nurtured over time. Patricia turned to the Psalms, as if it was her second nature to do so, only because over the years she was instructed and nurtured to think and act this way. She knew the Psalms the way she knew her mother tongue. The influence may have been subtle and indirect, but it grew out of her experience of the church. The Body of Christ plays a vital role in helping believers embrace the Psalms personally.

*We embrace the Psalms because they are God’s answer to us and our answer to God. The Psalms hold up both sides of the conversation. We hear the voice of God in the Psalms and we discover our own voice—God’s will and our will in dialogue. The Psalms are instruments of grace, tools of being and becoming, that guide us in true spirituality. By praying the Psalms, we learn what it is to be both human and holy in the presence of God. Their rhythmic arrangement, juxtaposing praise and pain, hate and love, saves us from shallow optimism and ornamental spirituality. Through the Psalms we gain a true understanding of ourselves and we enter into solidarity with the Body of Christ. In order to make the Psalms our own, we learn to pray the Psalms on behalf of others—the global church and the household of faith. We pray the Psalms in the light of Christ and in sync with our personal experience. Unselfish skill is required to line up the Psalms with life, to discover the deep correspondence between God’s will and the human condition. And perhaps some courage is needed as well.*

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 137.

We begin Book IV of the Psalms with the sober and searching notes of Psalms 88 and 89 still embedded in our minds. Far from ignoring the threat of the second death or the despair of a world void of God's saving grace the Psalms confront these issues head-on. The truth that emerges is two-fold. First, there is deep confidence in the Lord who saves and demonstrates his great love and mercy. Second, there is a yearning expectation of the Messiah that goes unfulfilled and is in need of completion. The Psalms emphasize both truths: the gift of God's covenant love and the consummation of God's great faithfulness in the yet to come Anointed One.

Psalm 90, like the two previous psalms, begins with a strong affirmation of an enduring and abiding relationship: "Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations" (Ps 90:1). Everything that follows in the psalm flows from this covenant relationship. This conviction grounds the discussion on the frailty, brevity and depravity of life and inspires the believer's sincere search for wisdom. It is out of physical and spiritual weakness that the people of God humbly pray for the Lord's favor in their lives. To be able to greet the morning with joy is a gift from God. To leave a testimony for the people of God and future generations is a blessing from God. Only the Lord our God can establish the work of our hands.

The superscription credits Moses, the man of God, with this psalm.<sup>5</sup> This gives credibility to the possibility that the psalm's back story may be the rebellion at Kadesh when the Israelites refused to enter the promised land and the whole assembly talked about stoning Moses and Aaron. The Lord responded by judging all the Israelites who were twenty years and older to a lifetime of wilderness wondering. Caleb and Joshua were the exception, but every other adult was destined to die in the wilderness (Num 14:1-43). Later, Moses and Aaron were judged for their own act of disobedience. They were told, "You will not bring this community into the land I give them" (Num 20:12). These tragic events in the wilderness may lie behind Moses' plea for compassion and his passion for the eternal and holy God. Moses knew something of the power of God's anger.

Spurgeon reminded believers that they stood on higher ground than Moses.<sup>6</sup> The power of God's indwelling presence, made real through the Incarnation of God and the presence of the Spirit of Christ, enabled believers to draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings (Heb 10:22). Nevertheless, Moses in Psalm 90 exudes a confidence in God and a grip on reality that is free from despair or bitterness. Even though Moses belonged to the generation that was passing away in the wilderness, his Spirit inspired psalm leads believers today through the challenges of this transitory life.

*God's Eternity, Humanity's Brevity*

*Lord, you have been our dwelling place*

---

<sup>5</sup> Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, NIC, 685. Tanner notes that Ps 90's dedication to Moses begins Book IV and a reference to Moses and Exodus 32 ends it (Ps 106:23).

<sup>6</sup> Spurgeon, "Psalm 90," *Treasury of David*.

*throughout all generations.  
Before the mountains were born  
or you brought forth the whole world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.  
You turn people back to dust,  
saying, "Return to dust, you mortals."  
A thousand years in your sight  
are like a day that has just gone by,  
or like a watch in the night.  
Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death –  
they are like the new grass of the morning:  
In the morning it springs up new,  
but by evening it is dry and withered.*

Psalm 90:1-6

Shortly before he died Moses pronounced a blessing: "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deut 33:1, 27). The theme of eternal refuge sets the tone for Psalm 90. The psalmist opens with the over-arching truth upon which everything else depends: "Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations" (Ps 90:1). This is not a platitude, but a profound recognition of God's loving care and eternal protection. There is no hint of despair or lament; "his spirit is one of humble submission and trust."<sup>7</sup> When we pray this psalm today we acknowledge that all of our weaknesses and all of our hopes are subsumed under this great truth. The sovereign and majestic Lord is our refuge (Ps 91:9). When Jesus spoke of the vine and the branches on the night he was betrayed he embraced the truth of God's everlasting protection and provision. He made the eternal refuge of God personal: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love" (John 15:9).

Time and space are God's creation. God lives outside of time. "His life is not dribbled out moment by moment like ours," writes C. S. Lewis. "If you picture Time as a straight line along which we have to travel, then you must picture God as the whole page on which the line is drawn."<sup>8</sup> Before anything ever was, God is. The mountains were birthed and the world conceived by the word of the eternal God, prompting the psalmist to declare, "From everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Ps 90:2). The author of Hebrews writes, "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible" (Heb 11:3). Mortals, by contrast, are mere dust. The Hebrew word "dust" is not the same as in Genesis 3:19, but the idea of returning back to it alludes to the curse of Adam and uses the same verb.<sup>9</sup>

Not only are we mortal, "earth to earth, dust to dust," but the psalmist is impressed with the brevity of life. We are such frail creatures that life passes by like a dream. One minute we are awake and the next minute we are asleep (a metaphor the psalmist uses for death). The new born

---

<sup>7</sup> Stott, *Favorite Psalms*, 77.

<sup>8</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 168.

<sup>9</sup> Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 328.

child makes us acutely aware of how fragile life is. To God a whole millennium is equivalent to a single day (compare 2 Peter 3:8) or even a four hour night watch (Ps 90:4). When compared to God our life span is like grass that springs up in the morning and by evening is dried up and withered. “It is like water spilt on the ground, like a shadow which passes when the sun comes out, and like smoke or mist dispersed by the wind.”<sup>10</sup> With a few choice phrases the psalmist cuts humanity down to size. Richard Holloway writes, “*This is my dilemma. I am dust and ashes-frail, wayward, a set of predetermined behavior or responses. Riddled with fears, beset with need, the quintessence of dust and unto dust I shall return. But there is something else about me. Dust I may be, but troubled dust. Dust that dreams. Dust that has strange premonitions of transfiguration, of the glory in store, a destiny prepared, an inheritance that will someday be my own. So my life is stretched out in a painful dialectic between ashes and glory, between weakness and transfiguration. I am a riddle to myself, an exasperating enigma, this strange duality of dust and glory.*”<sup>11</sup>

To grasp the brevity of life does not mean we accept the futility of life. On the contrary, believers know that this short life span is framed by God’s sovereign purposes and infused with God’s eternal meaning. The psalmist’s realism runs contrary to “a uniquely American persona filled with hopefulness, optimism, and expectation.” Medical doctor Samuel Harrington sees “our society’s emphasis on youth, celebrity, and consumerism coupled with the successful marketing of medical advances, health care products, and political promises,” as contributing to unrealistic expectations of longevity. Remarkably life-expectancy between seventy years and eighty has remained fairly constant. Harrington uses the concept of “compression morbidity” to refer to the fact that we are “living longer healthier lives and dying quickly with less disability.” Life expectancy is still about seventy-nine, with the maximum improvements in health occurring between ages fifty and seventy. In other words, “if seventy is the new fifty, then eighty-six is the new eighty-five.”<sup>12</sup> We are living healthier longer but still dying at about the same age.

We may like to think of ourselves as the zenith of evolutionary development, but the psalmist thinks of us as a wispy dream or a blade of grass. The psalmist did not use these metaphors to disparage humanity. He is simply being honest about our humanity. Our value lies not in our chemical constitution nor in our longevity. The meaning of the person lies in our unique and wonderful relationship with our Creator in whose image we are made. We are recipients of his wisdom, compassion, unfailing love, and favor. Before the psalmist is through he will move us from dust to destiny and from ashes to glory. But first we must reckon with God’s anger.

#### *God’s Wrath, Humanity’s Depravity*

*We are consumed by your anger  
and terrified by your indignation.  
You have set our iniquities before you,  
our secret sins in the light of your presence.  
All our days pass away under your wrath;*

---

<sup>10</sup> Stott, *Favorite Psalms*, 78.

<sup>11</sup> Holloway, “Dust and Glory,” <https://studiesinhope.com/2011/08/dust-and-glory/>

<sup>12</sup> Harrington, *At Peace: Choosing a Good Death After a Long life*, 30.

*we finish our years with a moan.  
Our days may come to seventy years,  
or eighty, if our strength endures;  
yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow,  
for they quickly pass, and we fly away.  
If only we knew the power of your anger!  
Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due.*  
Psalm 90:7-11

If our lives are frail and transitory in the physical universe, they are weak and corrupt in the moral universe. We live under a curse that strikes the body and the soul. As the psalmist says, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Ps 51:5). There is no escaping the verdict that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). We are in fact already “dead in [our] transgressions and sins” (Eph 2:1). We are all miserable sinners subject to the wrath of God.

The psalmist’s description of God’s anger is devastating personally. The language is graphic. We are consumed by God’s anger and terrified by his indignation. Our secret sins are exposed. It is like sitting across from the oncologist and being told you have stage four pancreatic cancer. Our sinful state impacts each and everyone of us in deeply personal and practical ways. This is not some abstract assessment that can be brushed aside. Being a sinner, no matter how good we think we are, is not some neutral propositional fact that can be duly noted and then forgotten. This is far worse than a jury handing down a guilty verdict and sentencing us to prison. Facing God’s wrath is far more terrifying. Judgment has eternal consequences. The psalmist describes an existential crisis that ought to scare the hell out of us. All of our days are spent under the burden of the fall and the weight of our sinful choices. Trace the cause of our mortality, weakness, brokenness, and brevity, back to its source and it is sin.

It is not difficult to imagine Moses penning these words and feeling their sorrow deeply. Nor is it difficult to imagine the editors and compilers of the Psalms drawing a connection between the wilderness experience of the Israelites in Exodus 32 and the exiled Israelites in Babylon. How does the pattern of God’s anger over willful rebellion become redemptive because of God’s mercy. Moses lived to one hundred and twenty years-old (Deut 34:7) and at the end of his life he was denied entrance into the promised land because he struck the rock. I’m sure Moses wished he had that moment back, when reverence for the Lord might have replaced his anger against the people. “If only we knew the power of your anger!” laments Moses. As if to say, “If I had only taken your word more seriously, I never would have violated your explicit command. I would have spoken to the rock.” Moses learned the hard way that the Lord means business, but don’t we all? We struggle to learn: “Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due” (Ps 90:11). Suffering and conflict dogged his whole life, Even the best years were filled with trouble and sorrow (Ps 90:10). Moses rightly observed that “we finish our years with a moan” (Ps 90:9). As we pray this psalm we sense that Moses was not bitter or angry. He knew he had no cause to be disappointed with God. Disappointed with himself, yes, but not with God.

*God's Steadfast Love, Humanity's Hope*

*Teach us to number our days,  
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.  
Relent, Lord! How long will it be?  
Have compassion on your servants.  
Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,  
that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.  
Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us,  
for as many years as we have seen trouble.  
May your deeds be shown to your servants,  
your splendor to their children.  
May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us;  
establish the work of our hands for us –  
yes, establish the work of our hands.*

Psalm 90:12-17

The sober realism and straightforward honesty of the first two sections leads to a communal prayer for wisdom. The psalmist enters a corporate plea for the Lord's compassion, steadfast love, empowerment, and favor. He gives voice to the holy ambition of the people of God. Having grappled with a biblical view of mortality and immortality, the psalmist prays boldly for an outpouring of God's grace. He prays for God's imperative action: teach us wisdom, turn back to us in mercy, satisfy us with your love, make us glad for the opportunity to serve, make your action in our lives real and glorious to our children, and establish the work of our hands. Instead of receiving what their fallen status deserves, the psalmist prays for a great reversal. Instead of turning people back to dust, he prays for compassion and strength to serve the Lord.

*Teach us wisdom.* If we do the math according to Psalm 90 we will use whatever time we have left for God's kingdom purposes. We don't know whether we are going to die young or live long, but we desire to make "the most of every opportunity because the days are evil" (Eph 5:18).

*Turn back to us in mercy.* The great truth of the gospel is this: "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). On our own merit we are but dust and the apostle agrees with the psalmist, "the wages of sin is death." But because of God's great mercy, "the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:23).

*Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love.* Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the well-known German pastor and martyr, was a strong advocate for morning meditation and prayer. He reasoned that since Jesus rose "very early in the morning" and "went off to a solitary place" to pray, so should we (Mk 1:35). Bonhoeffer insisted that our first thoughts should not be "our own plans and worries, not even for our zeal to accomplish our own work, but for God's liberating grace, God's sanctifying presence."<sup>13</sup> Bonhoeffer's lyrical description of the value of meeting with God in the morning is a beautiful meditation on Psalm 90:14 (see Psalm 5).

---

<sup>13</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Meditating on the Word*, 32.

*Make us glad for the opportunity to serve.* In the limited time we have left on this side of eternity we greet the challenge to serve as a joy and privilege, not a burden and duty. We aspire for the apostle's commendation: "We remember before our God and Father your word produced by faith, your labor prompted by love and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess 1:3). Paul was the best example of this. He embraced the mission of the gospel of grace with a palpable sense of privilege and passion. He made no attempt to cajole, berate or brow-beat people into the work of the gospel. What he sought to do was compel believers by his infectious joy, his profound gratitude, and his sense of great honor. He was truly grateful for the responsibility of administering the gospel of grace.

*Make your actions in our lives real and glorious to our children.* We hold the treasure of the gospel in jars of clay for a purpose, "to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Cor 4:7). We embrace the responsibility "to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people" (Jude 3). For we are called, "because Christ suffered for [us], leaving [us] an example, that [we] should follow in his steps" (1 Pet 2:21). We say with the apostle Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

*Establish the work of our hands.* Psalm 90 is often read at funerals, but it is always meant for the living. Life is short and we are sinners, but by the grace of God we have the promise of an abundant life on this side of eternity and an everlasting life when we die (John 10:10; 3:16). To that end, the apostle Paul concludes his powerful message on the resurrection with these words: "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor 15:58).

At the age of 25, Isaac Watts (1674-1748), often called the father of English hymnody, published a hymnal titled *The Psalms of David in the Language of the New Testament* (1719). At the time, congregational worship was limited to singing ponderous metrical psalms with the words strictly limited to the actual text of the Bible. Watts sought to change that by putting the theology of the psalms to a musical style that was more inspiring and expressive. Watts argued that hymns could be "free expressions of Christian truth in poetical form."<sup>14</sup> He based his first hymnal on a paraphrase of the Psalms and after 250 years we are still singing what God gifted and inspired him to write. *O God, our help in ages past* comes from Psalm 90.

O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,  
Our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home!

Under the shadow of thy throne thy saints have dwelt secure;  
Sufficient is thine arm alone, and our defense is sure.

Before the hills in order stood, or earth received her frame,

---

<sup>14</sup> Colquhoun, *Hymns that Live*, 69.

From everlasting thou art God, to endless years the same.

A thousand ages in thy sight are like an evening gone;  
Short as the watch that ends the night, before the rising sun.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears all its years away;  
They fly, forgotten, as a dream dies at the opening day.

O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,  
Be thou our guide while life shall last, and our eternal home!

Psalms 90 and 91 open Book IV with a vivid description of the existential threat facing the people of God. First there is the reality of the human condition: human frailty and depravity, followed by a fearful vulnerability to a host of life-threatening dangers. Yet the overarching reality is faith, not fear, the faith of those who place their trust in the Lord.

The two psalms run parallel in some key ways. The Lord is our dwelling place (Ps 90:1) and we dwell “in the shelter of the Most High” (Ps 91:1). Wisdom teaches us to number our days (Ps 90:12) and confession inspires us to declare, “The Lord is my refuge” (Ps 91:9). The holy boldness of Psalm 90 belongs to those who are able “to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus” (Heb 10:19). Seven imperatives satisfy the redemptive revolution and invoke the full range of blessing: teach, turn back, satisfy, make us glad, reveal, bless, and “establish the work of our hands” (Ps 90:17). Only the Lord, who became human and “made his dwelling with us” fulfills the seven-fold pledge: “I will rescue him; I will protect him. . . I will answer him. . . I will answer him. . . I will be with him in trouble. . . I will deliver him and honor him. . . I will satisfy him” and “[I will] show him my salvation” (Ps 91:14-16).

The reality of fear and the conditions that produce it are *not* ignored by the psalmist, but neither are they given first place. The psalmist opens with a faith-filled declaration. Praying the psalms invariably places human matters in the context of God’s sovereign power and purposes. We begin with an affirmation of confidence in God rather than an account of our troubles. The psalmist’s spiritual direction corresponds with the apostle’s encouragement, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Phil 4:6). Begin with God and prayerfully work through the problems. This is what the psalmist did. Before he detailed the dangers he devoted his attention to the truth. He began with four metaphors for security and four names for God.

### *The Promise*

*Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High  
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.*

*I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and  
my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”*

Psalm 91:1-2

Psalm 91 is a psalm about fear, faith and fellowship with God. The psalmist begins with a powerful faith statement, followed by a vow of trust. This eloquent opening is “enriched not only by the four metaphors for security (“shelter,” “shadow,” “refuge,” “fortress,”) but by the four divine names (“Most High,” “Almighty,” “The Lord,” “my God”).<sup>15</sup> This is not the kind of counsel that comes to mind when someone says, “Think happy thoughts!” There is not an escapist syllable in the psalm. Nothing is spiritualized and no short-term, quick-fix solutions are suggested. The psalmist insists on a peace that we cannot give to ourselves, no matter how hard

<sup>15</sup> Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 332.

we try, whether it be through mind control, mood altering substances, entertainment, or fun company. There is no humanistic solution to the deepest fears we feel and no diversion strong enough to give us peace. The psalm is not a prescription for stress management, but a description of trusting in God. Psalm 91 is about the peace of God, which transcends all understanding. It helps us embrace the peace that will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:7). Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (Jn 14:27). Psalm 91 helps Christians explore what Jesus meant when he offered a peace that the world cannot give. It is the peace that transcends our understanding that we seek to know and experience.

The opening statement of Psalm 91 propels the believer’s praying imagination forward to Jesus’ invitation to “remain in me” (John 15:5). The word to *remain* or *abide* or *make our home* with Jesus is used eleven times to emphasize the importance of making our home with Jesus (John 15:4-10).<sup>16</sup> To make our home with Jesus is to persist in the life of faith. It is a loyal steadfastness to Christ characterized by a continuous openness to all that God in Christ offers us. To remain in Jesus is a deeply personal experience but it is far more practical than it is mystical. The disciple’s life is expressed in loving obedience and obedient love. *Abiding* does not mean fleeing the world or disengaging from the world, but rather being like Jesus in the world: faithful to the Father’s will, compassionate to those in need, boldly prophetic to those who seek to manipulate the truth to their sinful advantage, and resting in the salvation that is by God’s grace through faith and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God. Being fruitful is a simple matter of hearing and obeying: “See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he promised us – eternal life” (1 John 2:24).<sup>17</sup>

“Shadow of the Almighty,” is the title Elizabeth Elliot chose for her biography of her husband Jim Elliot. What would cause a widow whose missionary husband, along with four other men, died in the jungle of Ecuador, choose a title that celebrates the protection of God? Only the peace that passes all understanding and only the peace that the world cannot give, explains such confidence in God. On the afternoon of January 8, 1956, Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, Ed McCully, Pete Fleming, Roger Yudarian sang together, “We rest on Thee, our Shield and our Defender.” Later that day they were killed by the very people they had come to help. “Mission accomplished,” wrote Elizabeth Elliot. “The world called it ‘a nightmare of tragedy.’ The world did not recognize the truth of Jim Elliot’s credo: ‘He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.’”<sup>18</sup>

### *The Peril*

*Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare  
and from the deadly pestilence.  
He will cover you with his feathers,  
and under his wings you will find refuge;  
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.*

<sup>16</sup> In our English translations of John 15:4 the second occurrence of “remain” is implicit in the Greek: “Remain in me, as I also remain in you.”

<sup>17</sup> Webster, *The God Who Comforts*, 96.

<sup>18</sup> Elliot, *Shadow of the Almighty*, 19.

*You will not fear the terror of night,  
nor the arrow that flies by day,  
nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,  
nor the plague that destroys at midday.  
A thousand may fall at your side,  
ten thousand at your right hand,  
but it will not come near you.  
You will only observe with your eyes  
and see the punishment of the wicked.  
If you say, "The Lord is my refuge,"  
and you make the Most High your dwelling,  
no harm will overtake you,  
no disaster will come near your tent.  
For he will command his angels concerning you  
to guard you in all your ways;  
they will lift you up in their hands,  
so that you will not strike your foot against the stone.  
You will tread on the lion and the cobra;  
you will trample the great lion and the serpent.*

Psalm 91:3-13

The psalmist exposes our fears and names them: the fowler's snare, the deadly pestilence, the night terror, the arrow that flies by day, the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, the plague that destroys at midday. We are subject to a frightening array of hidden traps and deadly hazards but the psalmist delivers an unqualified message of hope, "Surely he will save you." Danger lurks in the unseen trap laid by the enemy and in the infectious germs of a deadly disease. We are under attack by terrorists at night and by armies during the day. Disease stalks the darkness at midnight and plagues destroy at midday. The dangers are many: deception and disease, hidden evils and public calamities, personal traumas and shared fears. Evil works around the clock. Night serves to heighten fear and intensify terror, and daylight only gives our attackers a better target. We have real fears that attack the soul. Yet no matter how perilous the situation may be the psalmist boldly preaches a no-fear gospel. Although faced by pervasive, persistent and pernicious evil, we are challenged to trust in the Lord.

Throughout the section the reader is addressed personally. "You" singular marks the object of the Lord's affection and protection. The psalmist uses a full range of images from a mother hen collecting her chicks under her wings to a strong military defense that protects with everything in its arsenal from the soldier's shield to ramparts surrounding the fortress. The scale of the protection is unprecedented, "a thousand my fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you" (Ps 91:7). The promise and the peril could not be greater. The people of God form a minority that is threatened by all types of evil but they can afford to be calm because the Lord is their protection. They are not asked to fight, but to "observe with your eyes" the punishment of the wicked (Ps 91:8).

The counsel of the psalmist corresponds to the spiritual direction of the apostles: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:21); “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened. But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord” (1 Pet 3:14). “Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution. . . . Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown” (Rev 2:10). It is good for Christians to be shocked by evil and to feel the acute jabs of moral pain. If we are Creator-less, a mere product of time and chance in an evolutionary process, then pain and suffering must be accepted as part of nature. C. S. Lewis wrote, “In a sense, [Christianity] creates, rather than solves, the problem of pain, for pain would be no problem unless, side by side with our daily experience of this painful world, we had received what we think a good assurance that ultimate reality is righteous and loving.”<sup>19</sup>

We recognize what is ugly, because we compare it to what is beautiful. No matter how twisted and deficient it may be, humankind still has the knowledge of right and wrong. The wisdom and beauty of God’s order stands in stark contrast to Adam’s fallen world. Diseases and illnesses are defined in relationship to health and wholeness. Everything that might be lost through pain and evil, is what God designed and desired for humankind: physical health, emotional well-being, a loving family life, national peace and security, compassion for those in need, spiritual strength, and love for one’s neighbor. The problem of sin and evil is not ignored in the Bible, nor by God today. It remains the burden the Gospel.

You ask, “Where is God in all this pain and suffering and evil?” God’s answer is very straightforward. It is climactically expressed in the incarnation, the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. God put himself into the battle against evil, fighting for our salvation, not as we might expect, swooping down and destroying all opposition, because that would have meant destroying us in the process, but by taking upon himself the judgment for our sin. God himself died on the cross for our sins, paying the ultimate price for humanity’s sinful rebellion. Thus, the world’s worse case of terrorism occurred when Jesus was nailed to the Cross, because the worse case is not determined by the number of lives lost, but by the magnitude of the injustice. Christ’s cross is the world’s only hope for salvation.

We imagine Jesus praying Psalm 91 when he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Luke 4:1-13). In the midst of evil and in the throes of severe trial the psalmist boldly proclaims, “If you say, ‘The Lord is my refuge,’ and you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you. . . .” (Ps 91:9-10). The promise is strikingly absolute! The assurance is categorical! “No disaster will come near your tent” (Ps 91:10). It was precisely this absolute promise that the devil sought to use against Jesus. The devil followed Jesus’ “it is written” strategy and quoted from Psalm 91: “For it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone’” (Ps 91:11-12). This was a strange text for the devil to choose because it has to do with God commanding the angels to be our guardians. One would think that this must have been one of the devil’s least favorite psalms, because it stands as an indictment against everything the devil stood for. In his role as the great accuser he covertly used this psalm

---

<sup>19</sup> Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 24.

of protection to conceal his demonic purpose. Truth be known, he must have hated this psalm. What God inspired for our confidence the devil twisted for our contempt. The devil quoted the psalm word perfect. He knew *what* he was reading, but he didn't know *how* to read it. God intended the promise of deliverance for our confidence and assurance, but it was just like the devil "to read this promise as an invitation to arrogance."<sup>20</sup>

We misunderstand the Lord's promise of protection if we conclude that believers will never suffer harm, that they will never be attacked by a lion or bitten by a poisonous snake. Believers have been delivered from lions (Daniel 6:16) and saved from snake bites (Acts 28:5), but Christians suffer the ravages of war and violence, death and disease, scarcity and famine right alongside non-Christians. Cyril Okorochoa writes, "The word of the Lord is not 'I will save them from all trouble,' but 'I will be with him in trouble' (Ps 91:15).<sup>21</sup> The promise is not an easy life, but the promise of deliverance. Hebrews 11 is the story of faith and courage in the midst of struggle. It is a testimony against a prosperity gospel that promises health and wealth. There's not the slightest hint in Psalm 91 of a trouble-free existence, but there is the profoundest hope of eternal security. This psalm says so much about fear, that no one could ever surmise that Christ's followers will have it easy. On the contrary, we encounter trouble from every side and that is why we turn to the Lord to save, cover, protect, shield, rescue, deliver, and satisfy.

### *The Pledge*

*"Because he loves me," says the Lord,  
"I will rescue him;  
"I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.  
He will call on me, and I will answer him;  
I will be with him trouble,  
I will deliver him and honor him.  
With long life I will satisfy him  
and show him my salvation."  
Psalm 91:14-16*

Psalm 91 concludes in much the same way that Psalm 90 concludes. The Lord is our dwelling place and the mortality and depravity of the human condition teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom. We need the Lord to turn to us, to show us his compassion, and to satisfy us with his unfailing love. Only the Lord can establish the witness of our lives and the work of our hands (Ps 90:16-17). Psalm 91 begins with a personal declaration of faith in God and then proceeds to challenge the people of God to trust the Lord. The weight of the psalm stresses God's commitment to us, asking only that we dwell in the shelter of the Most High. Our work is to let God protect us, deliver us, and save us. All that is left for us to do is observe with our eyes the judgment of the wicked and the justice of God. The psalmist does not minimize the hardships that believers will encounter. The dangers described in the psalm cover the full range of fear, but we cannot save ourselves, only God can and he promises to do so.

---

<sup>20</sup> Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 333.

<sup>21</sup> Okorochoa, "Psalms," 699.

What does the Lord ask in return? Only that we might love him, honor him, and call upon him.

“Because he loves me,” says the Lord,

“I will rescue him:

I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me,  
and I will answer him;

I will be with him in trouble,

I will deliver him and honor him.

With long life will I satisfy him

and show him my salvation.”

This sevenfold promise places the entire responsibility for our salvation squarely upon the Lord. Our place is to love the Lord our God and dwell under the shelter of the Most High. Only God can provide our eternal security. The apostle Paul wrote, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Who can separate us from the love of Christ? “Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” Paul’s answer was emphatic, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Rom 8:31,35-39). Therefore, we let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts (Col 3:15). There is no better place to be than in the shelter of the Most High and to rest under the shadow of the Almighty.

Psalm 92 breaks out the instruments and tunes up the soul because it is good to praise the Lord. The intensity of Psalms 90 and 91 gives way to a Sabbath song of praise. To praise the Lord is to praise everything about the Lord. The psalmist covers the *why*, *when*, and *how* of worship. We praise the Lord for who he is and what he has done. In the morning we proclaim his love and in the evening we praise his faithfulness. By book ending the day the psalmist covers the entire day with praise (a figure of speech known as a “merism”). The psalmist explains *how* we should praise the Lord by highlighting music. Praise comes in many forms from graphic design and poetry to fasting and prayer, but here the psalmist calls for a ten-stringed lyre, a harp, and the human voice.

The seven-part chiasmic structure gives a memorable flow to the psalm. The why, when, and how of worship begins the psalm (Ps 92:1-3) and a picture of the true worshiper concludes the psalm (Ps 92:12-15). The Lord, the Most High opens the psalm and the Lord, my Rock, concludes the psalm. The second (Ps 92:4-5) and sixth sections (Ps 92:10-11) celebrate the great benefits experienced by those who worship the Lord. The third (Ps 92:6-7) and fifth sections (Ps 92:9) describe the fate of senseless people who flourish for a brief time before the Lord destroys them forever. At the very center of the psalm is the truth upon which everything depends: “But you, Lord, are forever exalted” (Ps 92:8). As Michael Wilcock explains the progression of the psalm “is as natural as going for a walk and returning by the same route.”<sup>22</sup>

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| It is good to praise the Lord and to make music to your name, O Most High. . . . (92:1-3) |   | The righteous will flourish like a palm tree they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon. (92:12-15)         |
|   | But you, Lord, are forever exalted (92:8) |   |
| For you make me glad by your deeds, Lord (92:4-5);  |   | You exalted my horn like that of a wild ox (92:10-11).  |
| Senseless people do not know, fools do not understand (92:6-7)                            |   | For surely your enemies, Lord, surely your enemies will perish; all evildoers will be scattered (92:9). |

### *Sabbath/Sunday Worship*

*It is good to praise the Lord  
and make music to your name, O Most High  
proclaiming your love in the morning  
and your faithfulness at night,  
to the music of the ten-stringed lyre  
and the melody of the harp.  
For you make me glad by your deeds, Lord;  
I sing for joy at what your hands have done.*

<sup>22</sup>Wilcock, *Psalms 73-150*, 82.

*How great are your works, Lord,  
how profound your thoughts!  
Senseless people do not know,  
fools do not understand,  
that though the wicked spring up like grass  
and all evildoers flourish,  
they will be destroyed forever.*

Psalm 92:1-7

Music is a flexible medium for worship that tends to mirror the local culture. There should be no such thing as churchy music nor music labeled “religious” or “sacred.” Music, like speech, often has a telltale dialect or accent, but the medium itself is neutral. The overriding concern is always the same: does the music serve the message? In the case of Psalm 92 the message is stated clearly twice, once at the beginning and then at the end. Music that serves the message will proclaim the Lord’s love and faithfulness. Music that accompanies the gospel will proclaim that the Lord is upright, “he is my Rock,” and in him “there is no wickedness.” Whatever musical style serves this gospel message is always the right kind of music. If the music gives rhythm and melody, voice and expression, to the exuberant praise of God’s people, then it is the right kind of music. Based on Psalm 92 Isaac Watts begins his hymn, “Sweet is the work, my God, my King, / to praise thy name, give thanks and sing, / to show thy love by morning light, / and talk of all thy truth at night.”

The Psalms call us into worship with vigorous songs of praise, “Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song” (Ps 95:1-2). Worship is exuberant, “Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs” (100:1-2). It is fresh and vital, “Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples” (Ps 96:1-3). We have a song to be sung to the nations that will turn their hearts to the Lord.<sup>23</sup>

The inspiration for this music is not found in a musical tradition nor in the talent of the musician, but in the full range of what the Lord has done. Who he is and what he has done inspires the music. The psalmist says, “You make me glad by your deeds, Lord, I sing for joy at what your hands have done” (Ps 92:4). The joyous good news of God’s action inspires the musician to lead the people in praise. The musician plays, the choir leads, and the congregation sings, because the Lord has given his people reason to rejoice.<sup>24</sup> The reason for praise remains constant, the Lord’s great works and the Lord’s deep thoughts inspire a full range of musical creativity that draws in every instrument, every genre, every style of musical expression and submits it all to the sacred purpose of glorifying God. The psalmist and the apostle are on the same page as to what inspires the music:

*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!*

---

<sup>23</sup> Webster, *The Living Word*, 108.

<sup>24</sup> Ross, *Psalms*, vol. 3:68.

*How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!  
Who has known the mind of the Lord?  
Or who has been his counselor?  
Who has ever given to God,  
that God should repay them?  
For from him and through him and for him are all things.  
To him be the glory forever! Amen.*

Romans 11:33-36

Worship that is set to lively and expressive music is never meant to soften or obscure the proclamation of the gospel. Music was meant to give an exuberant exclamation mark to the faithfulness and truthfulness of the Lord. Real worship exalts the gospel message over the musical medium.

John Calvin opposed “instrumental music” in worship because he claimed it aped the practice of God’s ancient people “in a senseless and absurd manner, exhibiting a silly delight in that worship of the Old Testament which was figurative, and terminated with the gospel.”<sup>25</sup> Sadly, Calvin got it wrong. His opinion against musical instruments in worship fostered a guilty conscience where God intended Spirit-filled inspiration. The Psalms teach the people of God to use every musical means available to praise the Lord. Thankfully many churches throughout the world participate in lively and joyous worship every Sunday.<sup>26</sup>

#### *The Benefits of Worship*

*But you, Lord, are forever exalted.  
For surely your enemies, Lord,  
surely your enemies will perish;  
all evildoers will be scattered.  
You have exalted my horn like that of a wild ox;  
fine oils have been poured on me.  
My eyes have seen the defeat of my adversaries;  
my ears have heard the rout of my wicked foes.  
The righteous will flourish like a palm tree,  
they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon;  
planted in the house of the Lord,  
they will flourish in the courts of our God.  
They will still bear fruit in old age,  
they will stay fresh and green,  
proclaiming, “The Lord is upright;  
he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him.”*

Psalm 92:8-15

---

<sup>25</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, 495.

<sup>26</sup> Ross, *Psalms*, vol. 3:72. Ross states that the essence of Psalm 92 worship is to proclaim God’s righteousness to the world. He adds, “Unfortunately, believers today have all but abandoned individual and corporate praise of this kind. When this happens, the basic witness of the church is seriously weakened.” My sense is that this pessimistic conclusion is unwarranted.

A simple one sentence statement of faith centers the psalm and signals our return journey through now familiar themes: the judgment of evildoers, the empowering of the anointed one, the flourishing of the righteous, and the proclamation of praise to the Lord. The psalmist sets up a striking contrast between the Lord who is exalted forever and the wicked who only flourish briefly before their destruction. The Lord's enemies perish. The righteous are empowered. Evildoers are uprooted and scattered. The people of God are anointed, consecrated, and planted in the house of the Lord. Like the towering palm tree the righteous are erect and dignified. They have the strength of the cedar and they still bear fruit into old age. "They stay fresh and green." The metaphors pile up to a crescendo that climaxes in the psalmist's proclamation, "The Lord is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him" (Ps 92:15).

The Lord is revered for bringing an end to evil, but there is no joy in seeing the wicked defeated, only relief that one day all things will be set right. We remember the word of the apostle: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9). Senseless people need not remain senseless. Fools can forsake their foolishness and become wise. The Lord does not make enemies; they make themselves. Evildoers are self-made and self-destructive. They run against the grain of the universe and become their own worst enemy.

Calvin is surely right when he says that the ignorance and blindness alluded to in this psalm applies to "all without exception, whose understandings have not been illuminated by Divine grace." "It ought to be our prayer to God," wrote Calvin, "that he would purge our sight, and qualify us for meditation upon his works."<sup>27</sup> The evidence of grace is found in the unique blessing that only God can give. The flourishing of the wicked and the flourishing of the righteous are radically different. The psalmist compares the short-lived success of senseless people who are destined for judgment to the enduring fruitfulness of an empowered and anointed people who are "planted in the house of the Lord" (Ps 92:13). The psalmist does not sell the aged short. He envisions a fruitful vitality that remains fresh and vital. Hans Urs von Balthasar observes that "Christian childlikeness and Christian maturity are not in tension with one another. Even at an advanced age, the saints enjoy a marvelous youthfulness."<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, 498.

<sup>28</sup> Urs von Balthasar, *Unless You Become Like This Child*, 41.

Psalm 93 builds on the theme of praise announced in Psalm 92 by proclaiming, “Yahweh reigns!” In this brief psalm the Lord is acknowledged as exalted over all time and eternity, over all nature and creation, and over all human law and conscience. The psalm heralds the news as an obvious and incontestable fact. Psalm 93 takes the centerpiece of Psalm 92, “You, Lord, are forever exalted,” and expands on the theme of Yahweh’s rule. This psalm is in the company of other psalms that proclaim the Lord’s sovereignty over all.<sup>29</sup>

It is impossible to pray the counter-cultural truth of Psalm 93 without experiencing dissonance with the prevailing scientific, social, and political ideologies. We are immersed in a culture that prides itself on nature alone and self-defined significance. Everywhere we look, whether in the family or the university or the workplace or in pop culture, the messaging is the same. Self-rule in a sphere of random naturalness is the prevailing ideology. The American dream and the ideologies of the West are in sharp conflict with Jesus’ gospel and the kingdom of God.

To pray Psalm 93 is to proclaim that Yahweh is king, that he is robed in majesty, and that he is sovereign over all. When we naively pray this psalm unaware of the revolutionary reality the psalmist joyfully celebrates we betray the God we claim to worship. We unwittingly evade the radical and subversive truth of the gospel by immersing ourselves in a world-view that reduces “religion” to the private self while we give our public selves to nationalism and materialism. We have not learned to laugh with the One enthroned in heaven (Ps 2:1-4) and we have not asked, “How much does our American pride in self-government unconsciously subvert our Christian commitment to God’s sovereignty?”<sup>30</sup>

Yet for many Christians around the world, Psalm 93 is a powerful statement declaring that the Lord is sovereign over the political regimes that exploit and oppress them. Early Christians prayed Psalm 93 when the Caesars ruled with an iron fist and demanded to be worshiped. To pray this psalm in worship was for them an act of subversion that required courage. Emperor Domitian filled Rome with statues of himself and required officials to address him as “Our Lord and God.” Domitian executed Christians in 93 AD, including his nephew Flavius Clemens, for refusing to offer sacrifices to his image. Psalm 93 was not a rhetorical flourish designed to give color commentary to Christian worship but a declaration of praise to the King of kings and Lord of lords in defiance of the Roman Imperial cult.

As the followers of King Jesus we were meant to pray this psalm in a new light: “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 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

<sup>29</sup> This group of psalms is known as the enthronement psalms (Psalms 29, 47, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99) because these psalms celebrate the reign of the Lord over all. Yahweh is King over creation and the nations. Waltke writes in *An Old Testament Theology*, 886, “I AM is king! He has been Israel’s refuge in the past, long before monarchy existed; he will continue to be Israel’s refuge now that monarchy is gone; and blessed are they that trust in him. His kingdom comes.”

<sup>30</sup> Peterson, *Earth & Altar*, 54.

might taste death for everyone” (Heb 2:8-9). The proclamation that “the Lord reigns,” is a bold political truth that runs counter to every sphere of our pluralistic culture – intellectual, social, political, racial, and tribal.

*Robed in Majesty*

*The Lord reigns, he is robed in majesty;  
the Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength;  
indeed, the world is established, firm and secure.  
Your throne was established long ago;  
you are from all eternity.*

Psalm 93:1-2

“Yahweh reigns!” is an exclamatory shout announcing the rule of God. Although we wait for the final consummation of the Kingdom of God, the psalmist’s focus is on the present reality of God’s sovereignty. The Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength. We are his subjects. Two fundamental facts are celebrated. The Lord established the world firm and secure and he established his throne from long ago, from all eternity. The psalmist begins, not with an expectation, but with a conviction. Whatever we long for in the future has already begun in the present. Believers consciously live under the Lord’s rule and in some significant ways they live above politics not only at the end of time, but now, in time. Their destiny is not in the hands of presidents, dictators, rebels, and terrorists. The sovereignty of God over all creation has always been true, but how we think about that rule has changed since the coming of Jesus Christ. The early church proclaimed, “For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col 1:16-17). In Christ, history has reached its tipping point and the crucified, risen, and ascended Lord has bound the devil for a thousand years and released the gospel to every tribe, nation, and people group.

In God’s merciful and missional millennium, Satan is bound and unable to deceive the nations for a thousand years (Rev 20:1-6). One thousand symbolizes the perfection of God’s mercy and the completeness of the church from Pentecost to the second coming of Christ. Martyred and witnessing saints in heaven and on earth continue to seek first Christ’s kingdom in the fellowship of his suffering and in the power of his resurrection. At the end of the church age all the images of final judgment, including the battle of Armageddon and the great supper of God, come to fulfillment. The impact of the Lord’s rule and reign from the ascension to the second coming of Christ frees the nations to hear the gospel. As the apostle Paul said to the people of Lystra, “We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony. . . (Acts 14:15-17).

The psalmist uses three quick metaphors to describe the character and nature of God. The Lord is robed in majesty, armed with strength, and enthroned for all eternity. The psalmist repeats for emphasis that the Lord is robed in majesty. “Not with emblems of majesty,” wrote Surgeon, “but

with majesty itself: everything which surrounds him is majestic. His is not the semblance but the reality of sovereignty. In nature, providence, and salvation the Lord is infinite in majesty.”<sup>31</sup> To be clothed in majesty and armed with strength corresponds to the apostle John’s vision of “someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest” (Rev 1:13). His eyes were like blazing fire; his feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace; his voice was like the sound of rushing waters (Rev 1:14-15). The apostle and the psalmist invoke meaning through metaphor by using royal and priestly images to shape and inspire our understanding of the Lord’s majesty. To worship the King is to remember that he established the world firm and immovable and his throne is forever from all eternity.

*Mightier than Breakers of the Sea*

*The seas have lifted up, Lord,  
the seas have lifted up their voice;  
the seas have lifted up their pounding waves.  
Mightier than the thunder of the great waters,  
mightier than the breakers of the sea –  
the Lord on high is mighty.  
Your statutes, Lord, stand firm;  
holiness adorns your house  
for endless days.*

Psalm 93:3-5

The churning, tumultuous, raging seas represent the unleashed powers of chaos. The psalmist takes this single image, the pounding waves of the seas, to symbolize all that threatens the sovereignty of God. The Hebrew people found in the raging sea an apt metaphor for natural disaster, social upheaval, and political chaos. All that threatens to overwhelm the world is captured in “this master metaphor for anarchy.”<sup>32</sup> The prophet Isaiah wrote, “Woe to many nations that rage – they rage like the raging sea! Woe to the people who roar – they roar like the roaring of great waters!” Nevertheless the Lord is able to quell the storm with a simple rebuke, “Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when he rebukes them they flee far away. . .” (Isaiah 17:12-13). Jeremiah likened the sound of an advancing army to the sound of the roaring sea (Jer 6:23; 50:42).

The meaning of the metaphor persists in our reference to the storms of life, when the waves come crashing down and we are powerless before forces beyond our control. If God is not sovereign, then we do in fact live in chaos. If “randomness and chance permeate the universe,” then we are all caught in life’s rip currents and we are paddling desperately to stay afloat as we drift out to sea.<sup>33</sup> The psalmist reminds us that the Lord is “mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea – the Lord on high is mighty” (Ps 93:4).

In the new heaven and the new earth, the apostle John announces that there will no longer be any

---

<sup>31</sup> Spurgeon, “Psalm 93,” *Treasury of David*.

<sup>32</sup> Peterson, *Earth & Altar*, 59.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

sea. But if your son like mine is an ocean life guard who loves surfing and can't imagine living away from the beach, it is important to understand what the metaphor meant to ancient Israel and to the early church. What John meant to emphasize was that what is missing in the new order is any hint of evil or the threat of tribulation. What is missing in the new order are drownings, storms, and shark attacks. What remains in the new heaven and the new earth are beautiful ocean vistas, great swells, and a sea teeming with God's creation. We can hardly imagine what life will be like without the threat of chaos.

The abrupt transition from the thunder of great waves to the statues of the Lord remind the worshiper that the forces of nature have met their match in the word of the Lord. Kidner writes, "Here is God's true glory, not of mere strength but of character: wholly reassuring, wholly demanding."<sup>34</sup> The defining word of God that issues out of the integrity of God is holy and true. This is the word that creates the household of faith that is one with the kingdom of God. Genesis begins with the earth "formless and empty, with darkness over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God is hovering over the waters" (Gen 1:2). And then God spoke creation into existence and he continues to sustain creation by his powerful word (Heb 1:3). While Job was still on the ash heap, the Lord spoke to him out of the storm and said, "Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me" (Job 42:4). When Jesus and the disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee, a sudden squall swept down on the lake and threatened to swamp the boat. In a panic, the disciples woke Jesus, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" But the one who is "mightier than the thunder of the great waters," simply "got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters" and storm subsided and "all was calm." Luke adds, "In fear and amazement they asked one another, 'Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him'" (Luke 8:22-25). We know this person to be King Jesus. Yahweh reigns!

---

<sup>34</sup> Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 339.

Two thrones vie for control, the eternal throne of the Lord (Ps 93:2) and the corrupt throne of the wicked (Ps 94:20). Psalm 93 celebrates Yahweh's reign. He is robed in majesty, he is mightier than the chaos, and his commands stand firm forever. Psalm 94 laments the power of the wicked to crush the people of God, to slay the widow, to kill the foreigner, and to murder the fatherless. The psalmist calls for the Lord "to pay back to the proud what they deserve" (Ps 94:2). This juxtaposition of psalms and the clash of thrones, one sovereign and just, the other pretentious and evil, is celebrated and lamented *in worship*.

The reason these two psalms are back-to-back and set in the sequence of Psalms 90-99 is because they explore the already and not-yet reality of the reign of God. God's rule has begun, salvation history is unfolding, but the final judgment and the consummation of salvation has not yet taken place. Meanwhile, the throne of destruction continues to produce misery and wreck havoc. The people of God announce, "Yahweh reigns!" even as they wait for God to set things right and bring about his judgment of the wicked. The certainty of the Lord's sovereignty is held in tension with the certainty of the Lord's retributive justice.

If we are guilty of a rote recital of Psalm 93's exuberance, we are probably guilty of ignoring altogether Psalm 94's painful plea for justice. We know neither the agony nor the ecstasy of real worship. We have trimmed reality to consumer satisfaction and left the real issues outside the scope of worship. We edit out the psalms that don't fit our up-beat worship service and we cut out subjects that people might find awkward or difficult. Psalm 94 takes us out of our comfort zone and places us in the mess and muddle of a sin-twisted, broken world. Who wants to be reminded *in worship* of evildoers who oppress the poor and gang up on the innocent? Acting as a faithful worship pastor the psalmist boldly says, "We do!"

Psalm 94 begins with a plea for justice, asking God to rise up and judge the wicked, followed by a description of the hateful actions and arrogant attitudes of the wicked (94:1-7). The "senseless" and "foolish" among the people are put on notice that the Lord knows the futility of their plans and lives. On the contrary those who trust in the Lord and put their confidence in the law will be remembered and vindicated (94:8-15). Yet this still leaves the psalmist feeling alone and vulnerable until he consoles himself with the Lord's unflinching love, security, and eventual vindication (94:16-23).

### *Judge of the Earth*

*The Lord is a God who avenges.  
O God who avenges, shine forth.  
Rise up, Judge of the earth;  
pay back to the proud what they deserve.  
How long, Lord, will the wicked,  
how long will the wicked be jubilant?  
They pour out arrogant words;*

*all evildoers are full of boasting.  
They crush your people, Lord;  
they oppress your inheritance.  
They slay the widow and the foreigner;  
they murder the fatherless.  
They say, "The Lord does not see;  
the God of Jacob takes no notice."  
Psalm 94:1-7*

The psalmist is eager for retributive justice, but only the Lord who is robed in majesty and whose statutes are holy can “shine forth” and vindicate the righteous. Only he can retaliate against the wicked, and set things right. To be indifferent to these fundamental concerns or squeamish in their articulation, *especially in worship*, is to turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to the pressing social justice concerns of the people of God. The apostle echoes the psalmist’s conviction when he writes, “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of the everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Rom 12:17-19; Deut 32:35).

The gospel does not displace the psalmist’s concern for justice nor render his prayer anachronistic. The psalmist’s plea not only belongs to an earlier dispensation, but to the shared passion of God’s people throughout salvation history. The Jesus-centered gospel echoes the psalmist cry for justice, even as it pronounces more emphatically the good news of salvation. We are all sinners in need of salvation by grace through faith in the one who gave his own life as an atoning sacrifice for our redemption. We must include ourselves among those who are guilty of pouring out arrogant words and oppressing others through our sinful actions. We may not have pulled the trigger on the widow or murdered the orphan, but through our indifference and apathy the helpless have suffered. The social justice implications of our wealth and power, of our voting record, of our hoarding of wealth, and of our business decisions will be reckoned with. In the church today, a couple, who has been denied health insurance coverage for an essential operation for their newborn baby, may sit in the same pew with an executive from the insurance company who made that decision. Everyday we make costly decisions that value the “bottom line” over the just and righteous treatment of the person. The authentic Christ-follower is called to make a kingdom of God difference in such situations or else be found among the ranks of those who say, “The Lord does not see; the God of Jacob takes no notice.”

To argue that the wrath of God is obsolete is to argue against the teaching of the Bible, the nature of God, and even the moral sensibilities of what it means to be human.<sup>35</sup> If there is no divine accountability for sin and evil, it is impossible to live out the gospel of Christ. To deny the wrath of God often means that one has not experienced the horrors of war and the tragedy of evil.<sup>36</sup> Let’s be clear on the meaning of wrath. Wrath does not mean “the intemperate outburst of an uncontrolled character. It is rather the temperature of God’s love, the manifestation of his will

---

<sup>35</sup> Webster, *Followers of the Lamb*, 231.

<sup>36</sup> Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 304.

and power to resist, to overcome, to burn away all that contradicts his counsels of love.”<sup>37</sup> The wrath of God is not an embarrassment but a blessing. It is a moral necessity inherent in God’s holiness and love and absolutely essential for human flourishing.

The psalmist paints a particularly colorful and damning picture of the wicked. The question, “How long?” is repeated twice for emphasis implying that this evil has gone on unchecked for some time. The wicked are described as jubilant and unashamed. They are proud of their evil accomplishments. They crush, oppress, slay, and murder the weak and defenseless among the people of God, boasting all the while of their personal gain and corporate profit. It is an “inside job” orchestrated by Israelites against the people of God – their own people. They project their own moral indifference and ambiguity onto God, reasoning that the Lord does not see nor care.

Through the centuries believers have asked this same question, “How long?” In the Book of Revelation martyred saints cry out, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (Rev 6:10). This fifth seal revelation honors the eighth beatitude: “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10). The apostle and the psalmist alike look forward to the judgment of God. But until then, patience, vigilance, and courage are required.

#### *Wisdom Prevails*

*Take notice, you senseless ones among the people;  
you fools, when will you become wise?  
Does he who fashioned the ear not hear?  
Does he who formed the eye not see?  
Does he who disciplines nations not punish?  
Does he who teaches mankind lack knowledge?  
The Lord knows all human plans;  
he knows that they are futile.*

*Blessed is the one you discipline, Lord,  
the one you teach from your law;  
you grant them relief from the days of trouble,  
till a pit is dug for the wicked.  
For the Lord will not reject his people;  
he will never forsake his inheritance.  
Judgment will again be founded on righteousness,  
and all the upright in heart will follow it.*

Psalm 94:8-15

Two groups of people are addressed. First, senseless fools are warned to become wise, because the one who created hearing, hears, and the one who created seeing, sees. In a series of rhetorical questions the psalmist seeks to convict and sober the Israelites who think that somehow they can get away with disobeying God’s law and abusing God’s people. They may conceive of a

---

<sup>37</sup> Barth, *Ephesians*, 231-232.

moralistic theistic deity that is satisfied with temple worship and is distant and detached when it comes to the daily affairs of life. The first question is incredulous: “when will you become wise?” The implication is that there is no excuse. The obvious answer lies in being convinced that God really knows and cares: “Does he who fashioned the ear not hear?” “Does he who formed the eye not see?” Of course he does!

The psalmist exposes two false dichotomies. Since we are prone to sin we like to think that God weighs in on the big issues and leaves us alone to do our own thing. The psalmist asks, “Does he who disciplines nations not punish?” The question implies that the fool thinks he can get by with his shady deals because God is preoccupied with larger issues. The second question, “Does he who teaches mankind lack knowledge?” The implication being that there is a big gap between theory and practice. The fool thinks to himself, God is too important to be concerned about my shenanigans. If the “little people” get crushed in my success plan that’s their problem. The psalmist weighs in against every effort to evade the moral imperative by stating the truth: “The Lord knows all human plans; he knows they are futile” (Ps 94:11). The apostle Paul quoted this verse from Psalm 94 when he warned the believers in Corinth not to be deceived by the wisdom of the age, “For the wisdom of the world is foolishness in God’s sight. As it is written: ‘He catches the wise in their craftiness’ (Job 5:13), and again, ‘The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile’ (Ps 94:11)” (1 Cor 3:19-20).

The second group of people addressed are the faithful who seek to please the Lord. They are not warned; they are blessed. These sincere believers are given reassurance that the hardships they endure serve to strengthen their faith. What the evildoer intends for harm, the Lord intends for our good (Gen 50:20). The psalmist implies that it is to our advantage to be tried and tested, because a true understanding of practical obedience doesn’t happen automatically. This is a powerful New Testament theme. Christians are called to “work out [their] salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (Phil 2:12-13). James said, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, when you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:2-4). The author of Hebrews believed that suffering provided resistance training, strengthening the believer’s moral and ethical actions. We were meant to become like Jesus learning obedience by what we suffer (Heb 5:8). We face a constant choice. We either take “the path of least resistance — going along with the values, norms, and practices” acceptable to society — or we obey the will of God and suffer “the consequences of criticism and condemnation by unbelieving family and friends.”<sup>38</sup>

The blessing of the Lord’s discipline is followed by the reassurance that the Lord will grant relief, “till a pit is dug for the wicked” (Ps 94:13; see Pss 7:15; 9:15; 35:7-8). The promise continues to be affirmed that the Lord will set things right and hold evildoers accountable. The Lord will not abandon his people, he will not forsake his inheritance. When the psalmist says, “Judgment will again be founded on righteousness, and all the upright in heart will follow it,” he is not placing the burden of good works on sin-prone individuals. He is not challenging the

---

<sup>38</sup> Jobes, *1 Peter*, 265.

faithful to try harder to prove themselves. On the contrary his message of reassurance is based on Yahweh's covenant commitment to his people. Righteousness rests on the covenant of grace and all the upright in heart rejoice.

*The Throne of Destruction*

*Who will rise up for me against the wicked?  
Who will take a stand against evildoers?  
Unless the Lord had given me help,  
I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death.  
When I said, "My foot is slipping,"  
your unfailing love, Lord, supported me.  
When anxiety was great within me,  
your consolation brought me joy.  
Can a corrupt throne be allied with you –  
a throne that brings misery by its decrees?  
The wicked band together against the righteous  
and condemn the innocent to death.  
But the Lord has become my fortress,  
and my God the rock in whom I take refuge.  
He will repay them for their sins  
and destroy them for their wickedness;  
the Lord our God will destroy them.*

Psalm 93:16-23

The dilemma of belonging to God in a perverse world is keenly felt by the psalmist. He feels alone and powerless in his desire to remain faithful. He is at the end of his rope. A lonely "me" cries out for help and quickly adds, "If God hadn't been there for me, I never would have made it" (Ps 94:17, Message). If the Lord in his unfailing love had not held him fast, he would have fallen (see Psalm 73:2). When he was upset and beside himself, the Lord calmed him down and cheered him up. Each problem identified by the psalmist, his vulnerability, his defenselessness, his weakness, and his anxiety, is matched by the Lord's help: his unfailing love, his presence, his support, and his joy. That "comrade in arms" feeling between the psalmist and the Lord is a true benefit to weathering the chaos of a fallen, sin-twisted and broken world.

The psalmist asks a question that demands an emphatic "no". The corrupt throne that brings on misery cannot exist alongside the righteous throne of the Lord whose holy statutes adorn the household of faith. Calvin recognized the danger of a similar "emergency" when "the wicked may be permitted, in the providence of God, to mount the seat of judgment, and launch destruction upon the upright and the righteous, under color of law." He goes on to say that "we must learn to bear submissively not only with unrighteous violence, but with charges most injurious to our character, and most undeserved."<sup>39</sup> Along these same lines, Spurgeon feared the tyrannical rule of a national church with its synagogue of Ritualism and its popish idols and pompous priests. He envisioned an immoral morality that reinforced sectarian dogma at the

---

<sup>39</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, 30.

expense of faithfulness and obedience.<sup>40</sup>

No matter how powerful the wicked may become by banding together against the righteous and condemning the innocent to death, the psalmist declares that the Lord, who is “my fortress,” “my rock,” and my “refuge,” will repay evildoers for their sins and destroy them for their wickedness. At the beginning, the psalmist repeats twice for emphasis that God alone avenges, and now at the end, he repeats twice for emphasis, that God alone will destroy the wicked.

---

<sup>40</sup> Spurgeon, “Psalm 94,” *Treasury of David*.

In keeping with the theme of the enthronement psalms (Psalms 93-100), Psalm 95 extols “the great King above all gods,” and leads the people of God in exuberant worship to the Lord, “the Rock of our salvation.” To this vibrant call to worship, the psalm adds an equally poignant challenge to obedience. The psalmist reaches back a millennium to when the Israelites were in the wilderness and rebelled against the Lord God. He draws out this sober experience in order to inspire a very different response among God’s people “today.”

Some scholars have argued that Psalm 95 is composed of two unrelated fragments, but most accept the unity of the psalm with its two definite themes and divergent tones.<sup>41</sup> There is nothing odd about combining in a single psalm an invitation to heart-felt worship and a warning against hardness of heart. The honest believer recognizes the need for both witness and warning, inspiration and exhortation. Psalm 95 unites faith and faithfulness, theology and ethics, in a Spirit-inspired synergy.

*Call to Worship*

*Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;  
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.  
Let us come before him with thanksgiving  
and extol him with music and song.  
For the Lord is the great God,  
the great King above all gods.  
In his hand are the depths of the earth,  
and the mountain peaks belong to him.  
The sea is his, for he made it,  
and his hands formed the dry land.  
Come, let us bow down in worship,  
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;  
for he is our God  
and we are the people of his pasture,  
the flock under his care.*

Psalm 95:1-7b

The call to worship is a simple invitation. There can be little doubt as to its meaning and no cause for confusion. If it is greeted with apathy or bewilderment it is likely that the hearer has not yet come to God and has nothing to sing about. The call to worship, “Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord,” is always preceded by the gospel invitation. “Come, follow me” (Matthew 5:19) are the first words of the gospel. Jesus invited people to himself, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30). The call to worship is grounded in the invitation of the

<sup>41</sup> Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 343.

gospel. When the Lord is indeed the Rock of our salvation we will have much to sing about and the call to worship will be embraced with enthusiasm.

We cannot respond to the psalmist's "come," just by showing up and being part of the crowd. Simply attending church is not what the psalmist has in mind. His twice repeated, "let us," envisions the real worship of the people of God. The welcoming imperative, "come," challenges us to sing for joy, to shout aloud, to bow down, and to kneel before the Lord our Maker. There is nothing complicated about the verb "come," except for the fact that it involves our whole being, body, mind, and soul. Worship is fully personal and participatory at its core, never passive. The psalmist describes the body language that engages the mind and heart and awakens the soul. Exuberant worship fills the hearts and minds of the people of God.

The psalmist briefly sketches the God-centered reasons for this call to exuberant worship. The Lord is described as the Rock of our salvation, the great God, the great King above all gods, the Lord our Maker, and the shepherd of God's flock. The psalmist's focus is on *who* God is rather than what he has done. Implicit in these descriptive titles is the recognition that God has done it all. The Lord redeems his people, creates the universe, rules over all authorities in heaven and on earth, and shepherds his people. He holds the deepest depths and the highest heavens in his hands, because he made the sea and "his hands formed the dry land" (Ps 95:5).

There is no room in faithful worship for polytheistic or pluralistic competition. Either the Lord is "the great King above all gods" or Israel's God is no god at all. Far from being a liability the exclusivity of this truth inspires the exuberance of true worship. Oprah Winfrey may express the opinion of many, but she contradicts the psalmist's conviction when she says, "One of the biggest mistakes humans make is to believe there is only one way. Actually, there are many diverse paths leading to what you call God."<sup>42</sup> One of the heroes of the twentieth century, Mahatma Gandhi, offered his conclusion to the matter in an essay entitled *All Religions Are True*: "Religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter if we take different roads so long as we reach the same goal? Wherein is the cause for quarreling?" For many, the only civil and reasonable conclusion is 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 global village shares different and distinctive religious perceptions of the one transcendent reality.<sup>43</sup> But this is not what the psalmist is saying. He is boldly identifying the one and only living God, who is Lord over creation and redemption.

The polemical force of the psalmist's exclusive truth claim against pagan tribal deities and the gods of nature should not be obscured in our twenty-first century setting. This call to worship is not an innocuous religious claim, but a powerful absolute truth that shatters pagan idolatries and secular ideologies. The apostles echo the conviction of the psalmist and make the absolute claim that salvation is found in the Incarnate One, Jesus Christ (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

---

<sup>42</sup> Taylor, "The Church of O," 45.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Burch, *Alternative Goals in Religion*, 111.

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.

### *Challenge to Obey*

*Today, if only you would hear his voice,  
“Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah,  
as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness,  
where your ancestors tested me;  
they tried me, though they had seen what I did.  
For forty years I was angry with that generation;  
I said, ‘They are a people whose hearts go astray,  
and they have not known my ways.’  
So I declared on oath in my anger,  
‘They shall never enter my rest.’ ”*  
Psalm 95:7c-11

All the joyful singing and loud shouting, all the thanksgiving and praising, all the bowing and kneeling, comes down to this exhortation: listen to the voice of God! The psalmist answers the call to worship with a challenge: “Today, if only you would hear his voice.” “Today,” like the word “Come,” has the force of immediacy and urgency. If indeed we are “the people of his pasture, and the flock under his care” (Ps 95:7), will we not want to hear the voice of the Shepherd? Jesus declared, “I am the good shepherd,” having explained that, “his sheep follow him because they know his voice” (John 10:4,11). He even spoke of having other sheep that are not of this sheep pen, adding, “They too will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:16).

Psalm 95 takes us back to Israel’s failure in the wilderness, when the beneficiaries of the Exodus quarreled with Moses over water at Rephidim (Exod 17:7) and then rebelled against the Lord at Kadesh (Num 14). Moses gave nick names to these notorious places, *Meribah*, meant *quarreling*, and *Massah*, meant *testing*. He gave these names because “the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the Lord, saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’” (Exod 17:7). Their refusal to go into the promised land summed up their chronic contempt for God. “Kadesh became the symbol of Israel’s disobedience, the place where God’s past redemption was forgotten and where divine promise no longer impelled the people to obedience.”<sup>44</sup> Psalm 95 goes beyond isolated instances of sin and exposes a persistent pattern of stubborn rebellion and hard-hearted resistance to the will of God. The psalmist picks up on this thousand year old history and exhorts believers “do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness” (Ps 95:8). Their constant waywardness is captured in the Lord’s verdict: “Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways” (Heb 3:10).

The author of Hebrews “makes these verses [Psalm 95:8-11] an urgent message for Christians

---

<sup>44</sup> Lane, *Hebrews*, vol. 1:85.

today.”<sup>45</sup> His exposition of Psalm 95 supports his warning against hard-hearted unbelief and inspires his vision for firm-to-the-end faithfulness. He presses home the urgency of his warning and the immediacy of his challenge by repeating *today* five times. The pastor’s confidence is not in his personal powers of persuasion but in the word of God which he describes as living and thus active, sharper than any double-edged surgical knife. “Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb 4:12-13). His exhortation draws on God’s precedent-setting judgment against the Israelites in the wilderness. He is concerned that believers were in danger of drifting away (Heb 2:1) and turning away from the living God” (Heb 3:12).

The author of Hebrews links Psalm 95 and Exodus typology to the Israelites in the wilderness and the Church. F. F. Bruce explains, “The death of Christ is itself called an ‘exodus’ (Luke 9:31); he is the true passover, sacrificed for his people, ‘a lamb without blemish and spot’ (1 Pet 1:19). They, like Israel in early days, are ‘the church in the wilderness’ (Acts 7:38); their baptism into Christ is the antitype of Israel’s passage through the Red Sea (1 Cor 10:1-11); their sacramental feeding on him by faith is the antitype of Israel’s nourishment with manna and the water from the rock. Christ, the living Rock, is their guide through the wilderness (1 Cor 10:4b); the heavenly rest which lies before them is the counterpart to the earthly Canaan which is the goal of the Israelites.”<sup>46</sup>

The pressing importance of the preacher’s exhortation in Hebrews emphasizes the repetition of the word *today* five times. Thirteen references to *rest* accent the eschatological vision of authentic faithfulness. These two words, *today* and *rest*, form a dynamic *already, not yet* tension. Daily faithfulness and everlasting rest are inseparably linked. When the next generation of Israelites finally entered God’s promised land, they experienced rest from their enemies (Deut 12:10; Josh 23:1), but that rest was only a type of the everlasting rest promised in Christ. The psalmist clearly meant a rest that goes beyond the experience of Joshua. “For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day” (Heb 4:8). The pastor sees the ground for this everlasting rest at the beginning of time in creation’s seventh day. “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his” (Heb 4:9-10). Taken together these two types, Israel in the land and God resting on the seventh day, point forward to God’s everlasting rest (Rev 14:13). In Hebrews we will see the significance of Christ’s high priestly work in achieving the ultimate rest for the people of God by fulfilling the Day of Atonement (“a day of sabbath rest,” Lev 16:31) and we will see that “the imagery of rest is best understood as complex symbol for the whole soteriological process.”<sup>47</sup>

The author of Hebrews picks up the redemptive trajectory of Psalm 95 and provocatively interprets the meaning of “rest” in the light of fulfilment of Christ.<sup>48</sup> When believers pray this

---

<sup>45</sup> Stott, *Favorite Psalms*, 86.

<sup>46</sup> Bruce, *Hebrews*, 96-97; see Jude 5.

<sup>47</sup> Guthrie, “Hebrews,” 959.

<sup>48</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, 46. Calvin minimizes the relationship between Hebrews and Psalm 95. Calvin writes, “We might stop a moment here to compare what the Apostle states in the third and fourth chapters of his Epistle to the Hebrews, with the passage now before us. That the Apostle follows the Greek version, need occasion no surprise. Neither is he to be considered as

psalm today we do so with the message of Hebrews driving home the psalmist's challenge of obedience. The preacher and the psalmist agree, "Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience" (Heb 4:11). The English translation, "make every effort," hardly does justice to the intensity of the Greek phrase. It means, "Take pains," "Spare no effort," "Give it all you've got." "This blissful rest in unbroken fellowship with God is the goal to which his people are urged to press forward."<sup>49</sup>

---

undertaking professedly to treat this passage. He only insists upon the adverb *Today*, and upon the word *Rest*. And first, he states that the expression *today*, is not to be confined to the time when the Law was given, but properly applies to the Gospel, when God began to speak openly. The fuller and more perfect declaration of doctrine demanded the greater share of attention." The author of Hebrews may take issue with Calvin's assertion that he is not interpreting or treating Psalm 95, but rather pulling out two words, "today," and "rest." On the contrary the apostolic hermeneutic depends on the whole of Psalm 95.

<sup>49</sup> Bruce, *Hebrews*, 110.

We picture these enthronement psalms (Pss 93-100) leading the people of God in celebration of the Lord's reign. They may have had their liturgical origin at the fall Feast of the Tabernacles, but they work just as well today when Christians gather to worship the triune God and celebrate the rule and reign of Jesus Christ. Psalm 96 draws on other psalms (Ps 29, 93) and is echoed in the Book of Isaiah (Ps 96:11 – Isa 44:23; 49:13; Ps 96:12 – Isa 43:23; 55:12; Ps 96:13 – Isa 40:10, 50:19,20, 60:1; 62:11).<sup>50</sup> While it may be debated who came first, the psalmist or the prophet, what is certain is the resounding call to worship. Through the centuries the people of God have been called to sing to the Lord a new song and to ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name (Ps 96:1, 8). The global reach of this call to worship is anticipated in Psalm 96, so we should not be surprised that believers all around the world use this psalm to worship the Lord “in the splendor of his holiness” (Ps 96:9).

The historical background and inspiration for this “new song” may have been when King David brought the ark of God into Jerusalem (1 Chron 16:23-33; 2 Sam 6:12-19). As the processional approached the City of David those who carried the ark of the Covenant stopped every six steps to make sacrifices. We are told that all of Israel was in on the special occasion. The people were shouting praise, musicians were blaring trumpets, and David, dressed like a servant, wearing only a linen ephod, danced with all his might. The king threw caution to the wind and abandoned any sense of royal decorum as he leaped and danced before the Lord. The occasion was marked by great joy and generosity as the people celebrated the testimony of the Lord's covenant promises.

The narrative behind the liturgy of Psalm 96 highlights several significant truths about worship. David's dancing before the Lord with all his might delivered a never-to-be-forgotten witness to the glory and majesty of Israel's covenant-keeping God, Yahweh. Consider the difference between David *lecturing* about the greatness of God and David abandoning all decorum and protocol and leaping and dancing before the Lord. All of Israel, from the lowest servants to the ranking members of his royal cabinet, witnessed in this processional the visible, visceral truth of God. Smoke and the scent of sacrifices filled the air. The king humbled himself like a servant. He took off his royal robes and put on a servant's tunic and danced with all his might! In that total sensory experience of sight, sound, smell, and touch David embodied the message. He might have said, “Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness” (Ps 96:9), but that day he proved it by his actions. Physicality and spirituality merged in a dramatic incarnate expression of lived truth. In reading between the lines of this story we begin to understand the adrenaline pumping passion of the psalmist.

Ironically, Uzzah's shocking death may have played a part in provoking David's passion. The seemingly innocuous efficiency of an ox drawn cart and Uzzah's innocent reaching out and taking hold of the ark of God when the oxen stumbled proved deadly and disastrous. “David was afraid of the Lord that day” and the whole “we-can-manage-this” processional ended right there on the spot (2 Sam 6:9). Three months later when the processional resumed nothing was taken

---

<sup>50</sup> Ross, *Psalms*, vol. 3:133.

for granted, every step forward was celebrated by king, priests, people, and musicians in a choreographed liturgy of praise. Uzzah's death humbled David, filled him with the fear of the Lord, and undoubtedly led to David's passionate and sacrificial worship.

Added to this experience, was the exchange between David and his wife Michal. She was embarrassed by her husband's emotional display. It is safe to say she understood nothing of David's embodied worship and devotion of Yahweh. All she felt was shame and disdain. Her anger and sarcasm can be heard in her rebuke, "How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, going around half-naked in full view of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!" David's response was spoken like a king, like an unashamed passionate worshiper. He declared, "I will celebrate before the Lord," adding, "I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor" (2 Sam 6:20-22).

*Sing!*

*Sing to the Lord a new song;  
sing to the Lord, all the earth.  
Sing to the Lord, praise his name;  
proclaim his salvation day after day.  
Declare his glory among the nations,  
his marvelous deeds among all peoples.  
For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise;  
he is to be feared above all gods.  
For all the gods of the nations are idols,  
but the Lord made the heavens.  
Splendor and majesty are before him;  
strength and glory are in his sanctuary.*

Psalm 96:1-6

Six imperatives launch this all-out call to worship: Sing! Sing! Sing! Praise! Proclaim! Declare! Every imperative is a call to action. Every one a vocal, vibrant, joyful exclamation, emphatically responding to who the Lord is and what he has done. Not all the psalms are like this, but this one is. "Nothing listless or introverted, nothing stale, befits the praise of God."<sup>51</sup> In the Spirit, the psalmist calls all believers to submit their traditions, habits, and liturgies to this flat-out, no-holds-bared, exuberant worship. Four imperatives focus worship Godward, followed by two imperatives, "proclaim" and "declare," that propel the message outward. In the Greek version (LXX), the verb to proclaim gives us the word "evangelize." Derek Kidner writes, "There may be a lesson hidden in this sequence (first upwards to God, then outwards to man): a corrective to static worship and shallow preaching alike."<sup>52</sup> The outreach of this evangelistic worship is global. We have a story to tell to the nations. Every tribe, language, people, and nation deserve to hear the gospel, because that is what it means to "declare his glory among the nations, and his marvelous deeds among all peoples" (Ps 96:3).

---

<sup>51</sup> Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 347.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 347.

The psalmist gives four reasons for evangelistic worship: the Lord is worthy of all praise; the Lord is greater than all gods, angels, celebrities, and leaders; for all these substitute “gods” are really no “gods” at all, just idols; and since the Lord “made the heavens,” “honor,” “majesty,” “strength,” and “beauty” belong to him.<sup>53</sup> Everything is encompassed under his sovereignty. The sovereign Lord is not some tribal deity who sponsors an ethnic religion. The Lord reigns over all. For these reasons worship and evangelism form a dynamic tension, each serving as an energizing and motivating catalyst for the other. Evangelism produces a powerful incentive to worship because both mission and worship are centered in God. Worship reminds us that “mission is not ours; mission is God’s.” We worship the triune God who is on a mission and when we worship we are reminded, “it is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world but that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission—God’s mission.”<sup>54</sup>

The psalmist shares a vision of the Lord of glory in his sanctuary that transcends the gods – the gods we make into idols, the celebrities we treat like gods, and the rich and powerful we envy and idolize. The psalmist leads us in worship, “Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary.” The psalmist envisioned the Tabernacle and the Temple as the testimony to God’s glory. Today, believers know that the glory of God was more fully revealed in Jesus: “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory the glory of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

*Ascribe!*

*Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations,  
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.  
Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;  
bring an offering and come into his courts.  
Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness;  
tremble before him, all the earth.  
Say among the nations, “The Lord reigns.”  
The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved;  
he will judge the peoples with equity.*

Psalm 96:7-10

The implication in the second section is that the worship inspired mission described in the first six verses has been successful. The inclusive gospel invites all the families of the nations to give exclusive devotion to the Lord the glory. The three-fold opening imperative to “Sing!” is matched by a three-fold exhortation to ascribe [give] to the Lord the glory due his name. This call to worship also appears in Psalm 29, but instead of the call going out to “all you families of nations,” it summons “heavenly beings” or “mighty ones” to give God glory. In both Psalm 96 and Psalm 29 the psalmist expands our vision of worship. The people of God are joined by the angels and the nations in giving God the glory due his name. The Lord is arrayed in the beauty of holiness and worthy of all praise. To respond to this call to worship is to “tremble before him” at

---

<sup>53</sup> Ross, *Psalms*, vol. 3:138-139

<sup>54</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 62.

the immense scope of the Lord's reign and the largeness of his salvation.

Christians do well to unite the psalmist's powerful vision of worship with the apostle Paul's opening doxology in his letter to the church at Ephesus (Eph 1:3-14). Paul leads believers in what it means to "ascribe to the Lord glory and strength." Everything good and right and true in our lives is wrapped up in praise to the triune God. Like the psalmist, the language Paul uses to praise God is exuberant and exalted. His praying imagination is focused on the Trinitarian pattern in creation and redemption — God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit at work creating, saving, and binding everything together by God's grace and for his glory. His scope is cosmic. There is nothing small or individualistic about this call to worship. The apostle and psalmist alike call us out of our small-mindedness into the most real world of God's glory. The specificity and expanse of the apostle's doxology fills out the meaning of the psalmist's invitation to worship — "to the praise of his glory" (Eph 1:14). We may struggle with the largeness of their vision for worship, because we are so easily tempted to reduce everything down to the small world of self-realization and self-discovery. But as David Wells reminds us, "The self is a canvas too narrow, too cramped, to contain the largeness of Christian truth."<sup>55</sup> The summons to bestow on Yahweh the honor due his name, to bow low to Yahweh in his holy majesty, and to ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name, reorients our motives and feelings.

The fervor of the psalmist's call to worship is eschatological in scope and corresponds to Jesus' Sermon on the End of the World, when he unfurled an all encompassing picture of the end. Jesus warned that "nation will arise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Matthew 24:7). He promised, "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). And angels will "gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other" (Matthew 24:31). Psalm 96 points forward to the risen Lord Jesus Christ and his Great Commission, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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." Psalm 96 should be prayed in anticipation of the healing of the nations around the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev 22:2).

Evangelistic worship proclaims to the nations, "The Lord reigns!" The natural world of quantum physics and the moral world of justice and righteousness are completely under God's sovereign care and ultimate judgment. "Against the welter of raging nations and collapsing regimes," the psalmist concludes with "a new and overwhelming assertion of sovereignty. . . . The disastrous freedom of the Fall will be replaced by the only 'perfect freedom,' which is serving God."<sup>56</sup>

*Rejoice!*

*Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;  
let the sea resound, and all that is in it.  
Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them;  
let all the trees of the forest sing for joy.  
Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes,*

---

<sup>55</sup> Wells, *No Place For Truth*, 183.

<sup>56</sup> Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 348-349.

*he comes to judge the earth.  
He will judge the world in righteousness  
and the peoples in his faithfulness.*

Psalm 96:11-13

Psalm 96 concludes with a thrilling panorama of all creation breaking into jubilant praise. The psalmist envisions the heavens rejoicing and the earth overflowing with gladness. Fields and forests are personified instruments of adoration. They sing the praises of God. In *The Lord of the Rings* J. R. R. Tolkien imagines trees obeying the will of their Maker. Trees are sensitive to the presence of evil and righteousness. For Tolkien the trees play an active role in protecting and defending the cause of righteousness. The psalmist's praying imagination agrees. It is as if all of creation is waiting on the edge of its seat, ready to celebrate, poised to sing "Hallelujah!" It is true "the whole creation has been groaning" but it is also true that "the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed." For when the Lord comes to judge the earth, creation "will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and the glory of the children of God" (Rom 8:18-22).

The invitation to worship, "Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord" (Ps 95:1), meets its ultimate climax and fulfillment in the coming of the Lord, when "he comes to judge the earth" in righteousness and "the peoples in his faithfulness" (Ps 96:13). These two comings, our coming to Lord in expectation and the Lord's coming to us and to all of creation in consummation, form the nexus for exuberant, embodied worship. We worship today in anticipation "that 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).

Evangelistic worship proclaims to the nations, “The Lord reigns,” and celebrates the universal rule of God’s justice and righteousness (Ps 96:10). In this sequence of enthronement psalms, Psalm 97 picks up where Psalm 96 leaves off. The psalmist concludes, “Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness” (Ps 96:13). The purpose of Psalm 97 is to explore the reality of the Lord’s coming, to understand the impact of his coming on worshipers and idolaters, and to work out the “already and not yet” experience of the Lord’s coming.

Yahweh reigns is a dynamic, universal truth that envelops the whole earth in “the splendor of his holiness” (Ps 96:9). His righteousness and justice are foundational to his rule. His powerful presence is felt from the villages of Judah to distant shores. Even the earth is glad and the upright in heart are filled with joy because the Most High rules over all the earth. The grandeur and glory of the living God is evident to all, even to the atheist, the idolater, the wicked, and the indifferent. “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse” (Rom 1:20).

*The Heavens Proclaim*

*The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad;  
let the distant shores rejoice.  
Clouds and thick darkness surround him;  
righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.  
Fire goes before him  
and consumes his foes on every side.  
His lightning lights up the world;  
the earth sees and trembles.  
The mountains melt like wax before the Lord,  
before the Lord of all the earth.  
The heavens proclaim his righteousness,  
and all the peoples see his glory.*

Psalm 97:1-6

Psalm 97 gives worshipers a full sensory experience of the coming of the Lord that appeals to our whole being. We are meant to feel the pulsating atmosphere of the psalm as much as we are meant to understand the truths of the psalm. To break down the poetics of the psalm into indicative statements of fact is to strip the psalm of its energy and emotion. The psalmist orchestrates the message so that we feel the presence of the Lord. The coming of the Lord rolls in like the thick dark clouds of a thunderstorm. His judgment is like fire consuming everything in his path. His revealing light is like flashes of lightning across the sky. The psalmist intentionally uses metaphor to enhance the primacy of perception. The coming of the Lord is escorted into our consciousness by the unleashed forces of nature. The poet psalmist knows that truth is not

pedantic and boring. It is vital, vibrant, and visceral. We feel it in our gut so we can feel it in our heart, so we can think in our mind, so we can act on it in our lives. This is why the “knowing” that accompanies worship takes in everything: music, science, aesthetics, sociology, and theology.

The psalmist begins with a geographic sweep of liturgical praise. “Let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice.” The Bible runs with the metaphor. If the earth is glad then the trees are clapping, the mountains and hills are singing, and the rocks are crying out in praise (Isa 55:12; Luke 19:40). Worshipers are liturgical environmentalists, not standing apart, but within creation to praise God. They are learning the language of praise from botany and biology. Along with astrophysicists they are dancing with the stars and exploring the depths with oceanographers.

Natural phenomena mark the coming of the Lord. Ten plagues of nature preceded the Exodus and at Mount Sinai the Lord came “in a dense cloud,” accompanied by “thunder and lightning,” and the mountain shook violently (Exod 19:9,16,18). Christ’s coming was confirmed by “signs, wonders and various miracles” (Heb 2:4). In the Book of Revelation a fourfold repetition of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake stand for the final and universal end of God’s judgment (Rev 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18). The first section of Psalm 97 makes a case for nature’s confirmation of the gospel. “The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all peoples see his glory” (Ps 97:6). This very public testimony of the Lord’s reign is not hidden in some secret enclave but published throughout the cosmos. This personal truth, is not a private religious truth, but a public truth confirmed in creation and celebrated in community. We are neither bodiless souls nor soulless bodies but bodies and souls in community.<sup>57</sup>

The power of the testimony in nature without and within the self (Rom 2:15) means that “the ‘I’ that perceives is always already a ‘we.’”<sup>58</sup> The worshiper is not alone and has nothing to conger up or make something of. The pressure is off because the testimony is already in the public domain. Instead of mounting a defense and making an argument, believers are called testify to what is already on full display. We are like the shepherds who heard the heavenly host sing, “Glory to God in the highest heaven” (Luke 2:14). We cannot help but “go tell it on the mountain.” We are compelled to glorify and praise God for all the things we have heard and seen.

### Sacred Games

All who worship images are put to shame,  
those who boast in idols –  
worship him, all ye gods!

Psalm 97:7

The seemingly intrusive and glaring reference to idolaters at the center of the psalm cannot be ignored. Not everyone is convinced that the Lord reigns. Nature’s phenomenal witness is brushed off by some. What the earth perceives with jubilant joy is rejected by the idolater with a shrug.

---

<sup>57</sup> Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 29-30.

<sup>58</sup> Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*. 84.

Instead of being awed by righteousness and justice, the idolater is awed by his images of success. He prides himself on his own gods. He is unimpressed by the consuming fire of God's judgment and unmoved by the lightning strikes of God's truth. The psalmist wastes no time on the subject of idolatry. Idolaters are dismissed with a sentence. He simply says they will be put to shame. But we may need to pause here and reflect on what the psalmist is saying.

Nietzsche followed-up his famous "God is dead" declaration with a question, "How shall we comfort ourselves . . . What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent?"<sup>59</sup> Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Kelly, two top tier philosophers from Berkeley and Harvard, claim that living in the secular age means admitting that there are no deep and hidden truths to the universe, much less revealed truths. But that does not mean people have to live in despair, because sports offers a new form of transcendence. For Dreyfus and Kelly, "Sports may be the place in contemporary life where Americans find sacred community most easily."<sup>60</sup>

On the surface spectator sports should be just an innocent pastime, a fun escape to distract us from life's routine. But if we drill down a little deeper we'll probably realize that sports is having a huge impact on how we think and live. The synapses of a brain trained to the quick visual stimulus of an NFL helmet-to-helmet hit, replayed four or five times, can hardly cope with hearing the human voice preach the Word of God. The sensual atmosphere of heart-throbbing international soccer is hardly a level playing field for singing worship songs. True worship is bound to be a challenge for sport junkies hooked on the game's adrenaline rush. Can we watch the second-to-second high impact visual impressions of the NFL or NBA and learn to pray the Psalms?<sup>61</sup>

In the modern pantheon of American deities sports ranks alongside money, sex, and power. It is an antidote to secular despair, a spiritual power that possesses, enralls, and captivates the American consumer. How does the visceral experience of a ball game match up with the invisible realities grounding holy worship in the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? How can the truth of our fallen human condition and God's redemptive provision compete with the throbbing excitement of a tie game in the bottom of the ninth, one man on, and the team's best hitter at the plate? Can the Bread and Cup compete with ballpark hot dogs? "The sports god is an enticing deity; he offers splendid moments of transcendence while never demanding that we take up our cross, forgive our enemies, or serve the poor."<sup>62</sup>

Most commentators skip over the reference to idolatry (Ps 97:7a-b) and dwell on the phrase, "worship him, all you gods!" (Ps 97:7c). The debate centers on whether this is a reference to "false gods" or "rulers of the people" or "angels." The psalmist is either commanding "false gods" to submit to the one true and living God or he is commanding angels to worship the Lord (see Heb 1:6; Deut 32:43 LXX). Ross concludes that "false gods" is the better interpretation: "Thus, even the gods that idolaters worship are inferior to God – so they are called on to submit

---

<sup>59</sup> Nietzsche, "The Gay Science," section 125.

<sup>60</sup> Dreyfus & Kelly, *All Things Shining*, 192.

<sup>61</sup> Webster, "Intensity Without Ultimacy."

<sup>62</sup> Galli, "The Prodigal Sports Fan," 49.

to the Lord. The focus certainly refers to the spirit forces behind false gods.”<sup>63</sup>

*Zion Rejoices*

*Zion hears and rejoices  
and the villages of Judah are glad  
because of your judgments, Lord.  
For you, Lord, are the Most High over all the earth;  
you are exalted far above all gods.  
Let those who love the Lord hate evil,  
for he guards the lives of his faithful ones  
and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.  
Light shines on the righteous  
and joy on the upright in heart.  
Rejoice in the Lord, you who are righteous,  
and praise his holy name.*

Psalm 97:8-12

Psalm 97 does not ignore evil, but neither does it dwell on it. Evil is dealt with in justice. The fire of God’s judgment consumes “his foes on every side” (Ps 97:3) and idolaters “are put to shame” (Ps 97:7a). Those “who love the Lord hate evil” and are delivered “from the hand of the wicked” (Ps 97:10). Yet, the dominant emphasis in the psalm is on rejoicing. Joy is the theme that runs through the psalm. The earth is glad. The distant shores rejoice. Zion hears and rejoices. The villages of Judah are glad. The upright in heart are filled with joy and the righteous rejoice in the Lord. The psalm ends on a note of praise: “Rejoice in the Lord, you who are righteous, and praise his holy name” (Ps 97:12).

The psalmist sums up what accounts for this joy in three fundamental attributes of the Lord’s character. Joy is rooted in the Lord’s judgments – “righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne” (Ps 97:2, 8). Joy is based on the Lord’s authority – “For you, Lord, are the Most High over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods” (Ps 97:9). Joy is secured by the Lord’s faithfulness – “For he guards the loves of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked” (Ps 97:10).

Wisdom distinguishes between the joy of the Lord and the happiness of the world. Several lines in the closing section of the psalm draw this distinction out and remind the believer in practical terms what it means to declare, “Yahweh reigns.” We need to let three truths sink into the essence of who we are. These gut level convictions cover the Christian life from worship to mission and from justification to sanctification and from devotion to ethics. It is not enough to think about them conceptually or believe in them doctrinally. We love and embrace them fully. Simply stated:

(1) *The Lord is exalted far above all gods.* The Lord’s command, “to have no other gods before me” (Exod 20:3), sets the people of God free from bondage. For “no one can serve two masters”

---

<sup>63</sup> Ross, *Psalms*, vol. 3:156; see Boice, *Psalms*, vol. 2:792; Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 350.

(Matthew 6:24). We are compelled by God's grace to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). This exclusive truth claim (John 14:6) is not our burden, but our blessing. For there is only "one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph 4:5-6).

(2) *To love the Lord is to hate evil.* Amos wrote, "Seek good, not evil, that you may live. . . .Hate evil, love good" (Amos 5:14.15), and the apostle Paul wrote, "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good" (Rom 12:9), and again, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness" (2 Tim 2:19).

(3) *The Lord's light dawns on the righteous bringing them joy.* Once we walked in darkness, but now we have seen a great light, "on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned" (Isa 9:2). We embrace this truth: "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you" (Isa 60:1). We look forward to a new heaven and a new earth and to the holy garden-city of God, "for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor to it" (Rev 21:23-24). But until that day we declare with the apostle: "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:5-7).

*Rejoice, the Lord is King; Your Lord and King adore!  
Rejoice, give thanks and sing / And triumph evermore.  
Lift up your heart; Lift up your voice! Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!*  
Charles Wesley

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. This fact was meant to inform our worship and our witness. If we ignore this fact we live like little masters of the universe or like puny pawns.

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).<sup>64</sup> 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)."<sup>65</sup>

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."<sup>66</sup>

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, plus 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."<sup>67</sup> 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?"<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 352.

<sup>65</sup> Augustine, *Psalms*, 481.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 482.

<sup>67</sup> Allen, *Missionary Methods*, 93.

<sup>68</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, 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.<sup>69</sup> Music is an important medium for revealing the Lord's righteousness to the nations. Melody, harmony, rhythm, and tone are not human inventions.<sup>70</sup> 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 (Eph5:19-20).

---

<sup>69</sup> Okorochoa, "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."

<sup>70</sup> 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, from the oceans to the earth, and from the rivers to the mountains, is excited about the Lord's coming. 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. 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).

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 (πατριᾶ) 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.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> Augustine, *Psalms*, 483.

The enthronement psalms celebrate the rule of Yahweh over all the nations, over all people, and over the fullness of salvation history. Christ's followers cannot pray Psalm 99 as if Jesus had not been born King of the Jews. Nor can we pretend that the Magi had not come, asking, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him" (Matthew 1:2). The King who reigns in "the splendor of his holiness" has come and he is Jesus of Nazareth, born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth, crucified and resurrected in Jerusalem, and seated today "at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven" (Heb 1:3). We have no theology that makes sense of Psalm 99 apart from the history of Jesus. We are not waiting for this King to be identified; we are waiting for his return. "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:28-29).

Three stanzas sketch the comprehensive impact of the Lord's holiness on government, justice, and redemption. To do this the psalmist paints a picture of the exalted King on this throne ruling over the nations. The second poetic vision is of the mighty King administering justice with worshipers invited to bow before him at his footstool (the ark of the covenant). The third scene pictures three famous mediators, Moses, Aaron, and Samuel, who on behalf of the people of God called on the Lord for guidance and forgiveness. In all three pictures the Lord is exalted and praised because he is holy. This threefold doxology, holy, holy, holy, corresponds to the prophet Isaiah's experience when he beheld the Lord, high and exalted, seated on the throne, and the seraphim were calling to one another, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isa 6:1-3).

The holiness of the Lord is not an attribute of his character nor a feature of his reign as much as the very essence of his being in relation to his creation. The Lord's holiness means that he is wholly other and radically separate from his creation. He is free from all contingencies and dependencies; he is free from all perversions, corruptions, impurities, and evils. With that said, the Lord's holy love and holy righteousness are essential for his creation and for human flourishing. We cannot exist for a moment without the holy otherness of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God's holiness, and there is no other kind of holiness, has made reconciliation to God possible. King Jesus holds everything together, sustains all things by his powerful word (Col 1:17; Heb 1:3), and reconciles to himself fallen sinful people "by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Col 1:20). His holiness sets us apart from a sin-twisted world, and sends us back into the world with the holy gospel of our Lord and Savior, with this admonition: "just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Pet 15; Lev 11:44).

### *Holy Government*

*The Lord reigns,  
let the nations tremble;  
he sits enthroned between the cherubim*

*let the earth shake.  
Great is the Lord in Zion;  
he is exalted over all the nations.  
Let them praise your great and awesome name –  
he is holy.*

Psalm 99:1-3

We have a vivid sense of nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom (Matthew 24:7), but no sense today of the nations trembling before the sovereign Lord. Human leaders and their peoples “plot in vain” (Ps 2:1). Nietzsche’s will to power is an apt description for the chaos presiding over the rule of nations. The political landscape bares no resemblance to the psalmist’s eschatological vision. To envision the Lord seated upon a dynamic throne of angelic power is to invite the modern reader to picture a dramatic cinematic scene in Star Wars. The reality of the Lord’s reign is so far removed from our daily experience and political thinking that it might as well be science fiction. However, the psalmist insists here and in all the kingship psalms that this vision of the Lord’s sovereignty is not wishful thinking or fake news.

Psalm 99 anticipates the power of the sovereign Lord to gather the nations under his holy government. Jesus’ Sermon on the End of the World corresponds to Psalm 99. “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him. . .” (Matthew 25:31-32). In the wake of today’s political chaos, the mission of the church remains constant, go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19), so that “the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). It is important to note that the Lord is gathering the nations not by conquering them the way an ancient or modern superpower would, but by the power of the sacrificial Lamb of God. The people of God will sing a new song, saying, “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” (Rev 5:12). We look forward to the triumph of the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, who is the Lamb that was slain. One day, “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them,” will join in doxology, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!” (Rev 5:13).

The political strategy of the kingdom of God does not line up with the American two-party political system or with any other political system. Psalm 99 calls Christians who feel threatened by secular culture to embrace the conviction that Jesus is King. Instead of growing bitter and resentful we need a renewed sense of the Lord’s sovereignty. If we have cherished the American Dream over the Kingdom of God, we are bound to be angry and fearful. The vitriolic rhetoric and slander expressed by Christians against politicians is not an indication of strength and boldness, but of fear and hate. It is wrong to place our faith and trust in political ideologies and politicians. Some Christians talk as if they had no other identity or loyalty other than to America and when things don’t go their way politically they are filled with anger and fear. The psalmist leads us out of our ideological captivity and into realm of Yahweh’s rule. “At present we do not see everything subject to [Christ]. But we do see Jesus” (Heb 2:8-9). Jesus was the one spoken of by

the prophet when he declared that “the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6). The psalmist reminds us that true worship is political. To say, “Great is the Lord in Zion; he is exalted over the nations,” is to confess an international truth that is as true in church as it is in the world, and is as political as it is spiritual. Holy government calls for eschatological thinking that sees today in the light of God’s coming kingdom of righteousness and justice.

### *Holy Justice*

*The King is mighty, he loves justice –  
you have established equity;  
in Jacob you have done  
what is just and right.  
Exalt the Lord our God  
and worship at his footstool;  
he is holy.*

Psalm 99:4-5

The King’s impressive strength is found in justice and righteousness. “Only in him are holiness and grace, power and justice, perfectly at one.”<sup>72</sup> Evidence for these attributes of holiness can be found in the revelation of God’s law. God “established equity” in Israel, and “in Jacob” he did “what is just and right.” The Law, including the sacrificial system of atonement, provided a shared moral vision and the redemptive means to overcome sin. The Lord established right and wrong (the Law) and the means of grace (the sacrificial system). All of which is summed up in The Shema or great commandment: “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). Implicit in this all encompassing command is to love our neighbor as ourselves (Lev 19:18).

The psalmist extols the Lord’s justice and righteousness and the prophets chime in with their bold exclamation. The prophet Micah asks, “What does the Lord require of you?” But “to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic 6:8). On behalf of the Lord, Amos put the priority on justice. “Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” (Amos 5:23-24).

The psalmist calls believers to “exalt the Lord our God and worship at his footstool; he is holy” (Ps 99:5). To lift up the Lord in praise and thanksgiving is to lower oneself and worship the Lord at his footstool. David described the ark of the covenant as God’s footstool (1 Chron 28:2). The ark of the covenant was the most important symbol of God’s presence in the tabernacle. It was lined and covered with pure gold, and it was stipulated that it was not to be touched by human hands but rather moved by specially made poles. It was but a box and not a very big box at that, measuring three feet, six and a half inches long and two feet, two and a quarter inches wide and high. Everything else in the tabernacle, from the table of the bread of presence to the altar of the burnt offering, was placed in reference to the ark of the covenant. Its lid was called the atonement

---

<sup>72</sup> Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 354.

cover and its contents included a copy of the commandments. By calling the ark of the covenant the Lord's footstool there was never any danger of confusing the object with the invisible reality of God. It pointed to the divine work of redemption and revelation necessary for the salvation of God's people, but it was never thought of as a substitute for the invisible reality of God nor as an object of worship and devotion. The ark of the covenant pointed away from idolatry to the human need for redemption and to God's merciful provision.<sup>73</sup>

### *Holy Redemption*

*Moses and Aaron were among his priests,  
Samuel was among those who called on his name;  
they called on the Lord  
and he answered them.  
He spoke to them from the pillar of cloud;  
they kept his statutes and the decrees he gave them.  
Lord our God,  
you answered them;  
you were to Israel a forgiving God,  
though you punished their misdeeds.  
Exalt the Lord our God  
and worship at his holy mountain,  
for the Lord our God is holy.*

Psalm 99:6-9

In the Book of Revelation the number three represents the triune God: God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Whether or not that it was in the mind of the psalmist is hard to say, but besides the threefold, "holy, holy, holy," we have mention of Moses, Aaron, and Samuel, and reference to the ark of the covenant (footstool), the pillar of cloud, and Zion, the holy mountain of the Lord. Three sets of three are poetically woven into the fabric of meaning, along with a constant refrain of adoration: "The Lord reigns. . . Great is the Lord in Zion. . . The King is mighty, he loves justice. . . Exalt the Lord our God. . . Exalt the Lord our God. . . for the Lord our God is holy."

Three notable mediators between Yahweh and his people are identified by name and characterized as priests who called on the Lord continuously on behalf of the people. "These servants of the Lord would cry out to the Lord, and he would answer them (Exod 17:11-12; 32:30-32; Num 12:13; 1 Sam 7:8-9; 9:12-13).<sup>74</sup> It may be significant that the era of salvation alluded to in the psalm took place before the people rose up and demanded a king so that they would be like the other nations (1 Sam 8:5). The Lord's answer to Samuel's prayer is poignant: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you: it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king" (1 Sam 8:7). For Samuel to be last the named person in this series of enthronement psalms may suggest implicitly that Yahweh has always been Israel's one and only

---

<sup>73</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, 78-79. Calvin makes two interesting observations on the ark of the covenant. (1) Calvin challenges Augustine's notion that the footstool symbolizes the Incarnate One's earthly humanity (see Augustine, Psalm 99, sec.8, 485). (2) Calvin challenges "the frantic bishops of Greece," who used this passage to prove that God "was to be worshiped by images and pictures."

<sup>74</sup> Ross, *Psalms*, vol. 3:181.

King.

Moses, Aaron, and Samuel, called on the Lord for guidance and forgiveness. The Lord answered them first from the pillar of cloud, and later from Mount Sinai, giving the people his law so that they could keep “his statutes and the decrees.” And he answered them not only with guidance, but with forgiveness. With a sense of endearment the psalmist says, “You were to Israel a forgiving God, though you punished their misdeeds” (Ps 99:8). These key mediators in Israel’s history point forward to Jesus Christ: “For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people” (1 Tim 2:5-6). Jesus became our “merciful and faithful high priest in service to God” so that “he might make atonement for the sins of the people” (Heb 2:17). He was appointed “to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins” on our behalf (Heb 5:1). He sacrificed for our sins “once for all when he offered himself” (7:27), “and by his wounds we are healed” (Isa 53:5).

Mount Sinai is not mentioned explicitly because it has been eclipsed by Mount Zion, but the author of Hebrews expands on the psalms final emphasis: “Exalt the Lord our God and worship at his holy mountain, for the Lord our God is holy.” The theological argument of the Book of Hebrews closes with a comparison between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion. The author argues for the complete sufficiency of Christ’s once-and-for-all atoning sacrifice. Everything Mount Sinai anticipated and foreshadowed has been accomplished in Christ. “You have not come to a mountain that can be touched. . . .But you have come to Mount Zion . . .” (Heb 12:18, 22). The religion of Mount Sinai has been replaced by something absolutely better. Instead of Sinai’s awful terror, darkness, and gloom, Zion is pulsating with awe-inspiring worship, joy, and love.

“But you have come to Mount Zion, // and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, // and you have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, // and to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven, // and you have come to God, the Judge of all, // and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, // and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, // and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel” (Heb 12:22-24).

The psalmist’s refrain, “he is holy,” is in the end expanded “and given warmth, to read (in its actual word-order) *For holy is the Lord our God!*” Kidner adds, “The majesty is undiminished, but the last word is now given to intimacy. He is holy; He is also, against all our deserving, not ashamed to be called ours. Well may we worship.”

This tiny five verse easy-to-memorize psalm explodes with meaning like a split atom.<sup>75</sup> Psalm 100 brings the enthronement psalms (93-100) to a resounding conclusion. “Of these royal psalms the hundredth is the doxology.”<sup>76</sup> The pulsating rhythm of action verbs makes it impossible to sit still and say this psalm without feeling. This capstone psalm is what we would expect after celebrating the global reach of the kingdom of God. To know the Lord who reigns in justice and righteousness and who is worshiped in the splendor of his holiness, is to express exuberant heartfelt joy. If evangelistic worship is the leading edge of the mission of the church then Psalm 100 is its jubilant crescendo.

Two parallel stanzas rhyme the invitation to active participatory worship based on knowing that the Lord is God, that he made us, that we are his people. The second stanza repeats the call to worship based on thanksgiving and praise, for the Lord is good, his love endures forever, and his faithfulness never ends. The voice that is calling out to us is the shared voice of the worshipping community. Psalm 100 is a hymn not a solo. Together, we share in the responsibility to encourage one another to “shout for joy to the Lord” and to “enter his gates with thanksgiving.” The psalmist does not envision a pastor-dominated worship service, where we sit idly by as observers waiting to be moved and inspired. We are not an audience of spectators looking to the “professionals” to do worship to us and for us, nor are we consumers of a spiritual product; we are active participants in worship.

Psalm 100 is a simple call to worship that serves its purpose effectively without much interpretation. Believers grasp its powerful meaning intuitively. The poet-psalmist has arranged the rhythm of its seven verbs, “shout,” “serve,” “come,” “know,” “enter,” “give thanks,” and “bless,” to give the psalm a driving beat. The thrust of the psalm is assured by its positive vocabulary modifying the verbs, “joy,” “gladness,” “joyful,” “thanksgiving,” and “praise.” And most importantly, everything said and felt is centered on the Lord who is the principal subject of everything going on the psalm. We worship the Lord. He is God. He made us. He is our Shepherd and we are his people. We celebrate his goodness, his enduring love and his faithfulness through all generations.

The beauty and depth of Psalm 100 has inspired hymns and songs of praise, including “Jubilate Deo,” William Kethe’s “All people that on earth do well.” Isaac Watts, “Before the Lord’s eternal throne, ye nations bow with sacred joy,” and Chris Tomlin’s “Psalm 100.” We should not be surprised that this psalm inspires musicians and artists and theologians. Its simple power should be embraced and its theological depth and pastoral implications explored.

*Shout for Joy*

*Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.*

---

<sup>75</sup> Augustine, *Psalms*, 487. Augustine writes, “The verses are few, but big with great subjects; may the seed bring forth within your hearts, the barn be prepared for the Lord’s harvest.”

<sup>76</sup> Stott, *Favorite Psalms*, 91.

*Worship the Lord with gladness;  
come before him with joyful songs.  
Know that the Lord is God.  
It is he who made us, and we are his;  
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.*  
Psalm 100:1-3

The sheer joy and exuberance of Psalm 100 encourages the worshiper to shed the inhibitions rooted in pride and insecurity and come before the Lord with a freedom rooted in faith and forgiveness. This is not a call to self-expression as much as a call to self-surrender in the community of praise. We are invited into a realm of joy that brings release from being overly self-preoccupied and relief from our deeply ingrained cultural traditions and habits. Psalm 100 draws the lonely individual out of the crowd and into the joyous processional. Instead of liturgical fastidiousness or entertainment, Psalm 100 gives the believer a solid foundation for the deep meaning and joyous emotion of real God-centered worship.

The first line of the psalm “should be thought-provoking to sing,” because it “claims the world for God.”<sup>77</sup> It harkens back to a theme running through the enthronement psalms: “Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music” (Ps 98:4; see 96:7; 97:1). The whole earth ought to shout for joy, for we all belong to the Lord who is our maker and redeemer. Steward Brand’s 1968 Whole Earth Catalog with NASA’s iconic picture of the earth on its cover celebrated two countercultural truths, the environment and the human community. Brand’s intuitive grasp of creation care and human society were surely right, but what was missing was his understanding of creation’s Creator and humanity’s Author, Redeemer, and King. Brand thought man’s spiritual longings could be fulfilled through technology, but only the Lord is able to bring about the new humanity for a new heaven and a new earth.

Invitation and imperative merge in the call to worship the Lord with gladness. This is not about happily attending upbeat church services. This is about finding our greatest joy and deepest meaning in serving the Lord with our whole being. Worshiping the Lord “involves a serious submission of the whole self.”<sup>78</sup> This is body-mind-heart-and soul-worship that does not cease at the narthex, but moves out into every place and in every sphere of life where we are “before him,” which is to say everywhere. There is no gap between worship and work; life is all of one piece.<sup>79</sup> The apostle Paul echoes this theology of worship when he urges brothers and sisters, “in view of God’s mercy, to offer [their] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship” (Rom 12:1).

We worship the Lord *knowingly* because the Lord has chosen to disclose himself personally. He is the same person who promised Abraham, “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:3). He gave his name to Moses, “I am who I am” (Exod 3:14). He promised David an everlasting kingdom (2 Sam 7:13) and to the prophet Jeremiah a new covenant (Jer 33:31). We

---

<sup>77</sup> Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 356.

<sup>78</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 3:135

<sup>79</sup> Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 356.

know him as our Maker; we are the work of his hands (Isa 29:23). We say with the psalmist, “What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor” (Ps 8:5). We know him as our Shepherd; “we are his people and the sheep of his pasture” (Ps 100:3). We know him as our Redeemer. Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). To worship the Lord *knowingly* is to say with Paul, “but by the grace of God I am what I am,” and to know “all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:10; Rom 3:24).<sup>80</sup> Psalm 100 celebrates the beauty of knowing God as our Creator and Redeemer with heartfelt praise and thanksgiving and without a hint of cynicism or discouragement.

*Enter with Praise*

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving  
and his courts with praise;  
give thanks to him and praise his name.  
For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;  
his faithfulness continues through all generations.*

Psalm 100:4-5

The universal invitation to “enter his gates” goes out to all the nations from the people of God. The reasons for God’s magnanimous openness to all are clearly stated. His goodness, love, and faithfulness are forever. But the psalmist did not realize then what we know now that “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whosoever believes in him should not die but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). We cannot imagine Jesus praying this psalm without envisioning the universal reach of the gospel. The privilege and responsibility to offer this call to worship to the world belongs to the priesthood of all believers, to all those who have been commissioned by Christ “to go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). Our joy is to encourage and support one another in worship and service. The vision of temple worship pictured in Psalm 100 is transposed in the New Testament and applied to the church – the people of God: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pet 2:9). This is why the author of Hebrews declares:

“Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart with full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another

---

<sup>80</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, 84. In contrast to the exuberance of Psalm 100, Calvin’s exposition of these verses is decidedly negative. He alludes to the Papacy and the impossibility of true worship of God taking place while God’s glory is being profaned and superstition exists. Ironically, Calvin uses this psalm to address the ingratitude found among most people: “. . . Scarcely one among a hundred seriously acknowledges that he holds his existence from God. . . yet every man makes a god of himself, and virtually worships himself, when he ascribes to his own power what God declares belong to him alone.”

on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb 10:19-25).

The enthronement psalms (Psalms 93-100) come to a resounding conclusion with jubilant praise and thanksgiving, even as the king takes responsibility for assuring righteousness and moral order in the city of God. David is credited with this psalm and Psalm 103, the only two David psalms in Book IV. Psalm 101 reflects the young king's passion for righteousness. If the jubilation expressed in Psalm 100 is going to characterize the people of God then the righteousness and justice of God must be David's number one priority. Kings and politicians promise security and prosperity, but if they do not pursue God's moral-order they leave a legacy of disaster. In spite of critical moral failures throughout his life, David knew what was expected of a king who was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam 13:14).

The gated community of Zion excludes evil in all of its vile, perverse, arrogant, and deceptive forms (Rev 22:14-15). This ideal administration concentrates first and foremost on biblical integrity and social justice. In Psalm 101 there is no division between personal morality and public justice. The king's efforts "to lead a blameless life" and to conduct his administration "with a blameless heart" (Ps 101:) involve surrounding himself with those "whose walk is blameless" (Ps 101:6). The king must also be committed to separating himself and his people from "anything that is vile" (Ps 101:3) and from those whose heart is perverse (Ps 101:4). The categorical imperatives of this psalm leave little room for ambiguity and compromise. Against evil and its destructive ways the king is defiant, "No one who practices deceit will dwell in my house; no one who speaks falsely will stand in my presence" (Ps 101:7).

#### *Personal Commitment*

*I will sing of your love [hesed] and justice;  
to you, Lord, I will sing praise.  
I will be careful to lead a blameless life –  
when will you come to me?  
I will conduct the affairs of my house  
with a blameless heart.  
I will not look with approval  
on anything that is vile.  
I hate what faithless people do;  
I will have nothing to do with what is evil.*

Psalm 101:1-4

Worship is not forgotten, but is emphasized as a critical factor in the pursuit of justice. The psalmist pledges to chant a melody, a praise song celebrating the Lord's steadfast love and justice. David's resolve to sing about God's covenant faithfulness is fundamental to his kingdom ethic. This single verse speaks volumes, not only of the king's emotive commitment to justice, but of his theological understanding. It is the grace and holiness of God that undergirds the king's passion. Mercy and judgment originate with "the great King above all gods" (Ps 95:3). The psalmist knows that apart from the grace of God we cannot know and obey the will of God.

The king's theme song is a constant reminder that everything depends on the grace and mercy of God. This is equivalent to Jesus' beatitude-based belief or Paul's justification by faith in Romans. This is the reminder that "it is God who works in [us] to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose" (Phil 2:13).

The king pledges to the Lord to lead by example. He is committed to working out his salvation "with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12). He longs for the imminent presence of God, for a vivid sense of God's intimate fellowship. The quest for social justice and moral order is always and only a corollary to the reality of knowing God. The rhythmic beat of Psalm 101 is set by the repetition of the psalmist's for-the-record, first-person, vowed commitments. An emphatic "I will" accentuates the determination and devotion of David's long obedience in the same direction.

By promising to "conduct the affairs of my house with a blameless heart" (Ps 101:2c), the psalmist is committed to integrity personally and publically. He melds "house" and "heart" in a unified grasp of ethical responsibility. He will rule others as he will rule himself. "House" has a range of meanings for the worshiper, from David's royal palace to the House of the Lord and the people of Israel. All believers are in some way instructed by David's example. The pledge of moral responsibility extends from the self to the family to the household of faith and to society. In every sphere, the commitment before the Lord is the same, to "a blameless heart."

The meaning of a blameless heart is illustrated in several ways. The psalmist refuses to be influenced or enticed by anything that is vile, meaning anything that is wicked and worthless.<sup>81</sup> He will not tolerate what faithless people do or put up with evil in any form. The intensity of the psalmist's repulsion is captured in the word, "hate," but this is not the raw emotion of hate that is expressed in Psalm 137. It is more a matter of spiritual discernment, the wisdom necessary to distance oneself from influences that cause harm. "Hatred is an important spiritual and moral virtue (Ps 139:19-22), as Jesus affirmed (Luke 14:26)."<sup>82</sup>

The psalmist's convictions are echoed in the apostles. The faithful will not "depart from the truth" (2 Tim 2:18), but will rather "abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against the soul" (1 Pet 2:11). Allusions to Psalm 101 can be found in Paul's spiritual direction to the church at Rome: "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good" (Rom 12:9). The well known case of incest in the church at Corinth caused Paul to distinguish between associating with sexually immoral people who claimed to be Christians and people in the world who were not Christians. Paul said, "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people – not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave the world." Paul sought to preserve ethical integrity in the household of faith and evangelistic outreach in the world. In keeping with the psalmist, Paul made it clear, "You must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people" (1 Cor 5:9-11).

---

<sup>81</sup> Ross, *Psalms*, vol. 3:201.

<sup>82</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 3:143.

Some may read the urgency and intensity of psalmist’s vowed moral convictions as legalistic, but only if they fail to understand what it means to seek first Christ’s kingdom and his righteousness (Matthew 6:33). Jesus came not to abolish God’s law, but to draw out the significance of the law and to fulfill all that God intended through the law. Jesus came to establish the law, not undermine it; to complete it, not condemn it. By reducing it to an external religious activity and legal code, the Pharisees short-circuited the intended meaning of the law. They were guilty of missing the meaning of the law by substituting external religious conformity for heart righteousness. Jesus’ promise to fulfill the law and the prophets is inclusive of everything the Old Testament taught, symbolized, modeled, and looked forward to. Jesus fulfilled the covenant promises made to Abraham and David. He accomplished everything anticipated in the burnt sacrifices, Passover Lamb, and tabernacle. He exemplified the perseverance of Job and the faithfulness of Abraham. He embodied the goal of the law espoused by the prophets in his own righteousness. In every way – doctrinally, ethically, and ceremonially – the law finds its completion in Jesus. All this lies behind Jesus’ concise affirmation, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17).<sup>83</sup>

*Public Administration*

*Whoever slanders their neighbor in secret,  
I will put to silence;  
whoever has haughty eyes and a proud heart,  
I will not tolerate.  
My eyes will be on the faithful in the land,  
that they may dwell with me;  
the one whose walk is blameless  
will minister to me.  
No one who practices deceit  
will dwell in my house;  
no one who speaks falsely  
will stand in my presence.  
Every morning I will put to silence  
all the wicked in the land;  
I will cut off every evildoer  
from the city of the Lord.*

Psalm 101:5-8

The pursuit of justice is the king’s high calling. The challenge to root out the hidden crimes of secret slander and arrogance may impress us as nearly impossible. It is hard enough to prosecute overt evil, but the king pledges to go after “secret actions and inner attitudes.”<sup>84</sup> He wants to remove people from public office who through their slander and arrogance cause division and discord. This level of justice in the ranks of government is unheard of, but “as head of the political machine and as the guardian of justice” the king vows to disqualify gossipers and

<sup>83</sup> Webster, *The Easy Yoke*, 96.

<sup>84</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 3:143.

patronizing egotists.<sup>85</sup> The king has his eyes on people with character who are good from the inside-out. “The faithful in the land” are beatitude-based believers, with salt and light impact, whose heart righteousness chooses love instead of hate, purity instead of lust, fidelity instead of infidelity, honesty instead of dishonesty, reconciliation instead of retaliation, and prayer over revenge (Matthew 5:1-48).

The king’s desire to root out evil in his administration is a most worthy goal. Just imagine a king who pledges that he is committed every waking moment from morning to night to silencing “all the wicked in the land” and cutting “off every evildoer from the city of the Lord” (Ps 101:8). However, this is a shared endeavor with the king taking the lead. This vow of justice and righteousness should be on the lips of every parent, official, administrator, pastor, teacher, coach, and employer. We should be able to say, “I will conduct the affairs of my house [family, office, company, class, team] with a blameless heart” (Ps 101:2c).

Psalms 101 is associated with David, but we know the king did not live up to this high calling to personal and public righteousness and social justice. This psalm serves as an indictment against David’s will to power over Bathsheba (2 Sam 11-12) and his insistence on counting the fighting men (2 Sam 24:1-17). David’s confession, “I have sinned; I, the shepherd, have done wrong,” is a confession that we all need to echo one way or another over the course of our lives. David’s passion for righteousness and justice, along with his marked failure, serve to center our hopes and expectations on the one who “has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin” (Heb 4:15).

Leslie Allen writes, “Ultimately the Christian will view the psalm in the light of Isaiah 11:1-5.”<sup>86</sup> One greater than David has come, springing up “from the stump of Jesse,” who has the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord and “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isa 11:9). In his sermon to the Athenians on Mars Hill, the apostle Paul looked forward to the day “when [God] will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31)

---

<sup>85</sup> Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 359.

<sup>86</sup> Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, 7.

This is a prayer for desperate times. The psalmist is distressed and destitute, unable to cope, and filled with despair. His life is upended and he is barely hanging on.<sup>87</sup> This is not an everyday prayer. It is reserved for those times of grief, loneliness, and utter weakness that bring us to the edge of the abyss. This is not Job's original prayer, but he probably prayed this way sitting on the ash heap after everything was taken away. The prophet Jeremiah may have prayed this very psalm, because it gave him words to articulate his pain and dismay, his agonizing desperation. Jesus' Prayer Book has several psalms that might have been prayed by our Lord in Gethsemane and this is one of them.

What stands out about this personal lament is the worshiper's in-depth understanding and confidence in the sovereign Lord coupled with his genuine grasp of the big picture of salvation. Rarely are these two extremes, personal despair and solid theological understanding, juxtaposed in such a dynamic way. The psalmist portrays his dark desperation in tension with his unwavering belief in the Lord's sovereignty and in the future of salvation. He chooses to locate his personal trauma in the larger picture of God's eternal security. Raw emotion is freely expressed and mature theology is beautifully articulated. We are given a psalm that melds the dark night of despair with the living hope "that is ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet 1:5).

The author of Hebrews eloquently quotes seven passages at the beginning of his epistle including Psalm 102:25-27 to prove the deity and exaltation of the Son. The Greek translation (LXX) adds, "O Lord," to Psalm 102:24, so the text reads, "He [God] also says, 'In the beginning, *O Lord*, you laid the foundation of the earth.'" The meaning is similar to Psalm 110:1, "The Lord says to my Lord." The author of Hebrews interprets the psalm as the Father addressing the Son and crediting the Son with the creation of the cosmos. This raises the reasonable possibility that the author of Hebrews understood the whole psalm as messianic and descriptive of the life of Jesus (metalepsis). If we read Psalm 102 from the perspective of Jesus's earthly suffering and heavenly exaltation we get the full Messianic perspective. The psalmist's experience of fear and isolation correlates objectively with the Messiah's Gethsemane experience (Ps 102:1-11). And if the psalmist felt he was cut down in his prime (Ps 102:23 Message) this was even more true for the Lord Jesus whose days were cut short at the cross.

*My Prayer, My Days*

*Hear my prayer, Lord;  
let my cry for help come to you.  
Do not hide your face from me  
when I am in distress.  
Turn your ear to me;*

---

<sup>87</sup> The early church classified Psalm 102 as one of the seven penitential psalms (Pss 6, 32, 38, 51, 130, 143), but the cause of the person's suffering is not tied to a confession of sin. It is "the cry of one whose sufferings are unexplained, like Job's" (Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 360).

*when I call, answer me quickly.  
 For my days vanish like smoke;  
 my bones burn like glowing embers.  
 My heart is blighted and withered like grass;  
 I forget to eat my food.  
 In my distress I groan aloud  
 and am reduced to skin and bones.  
 I am like a desert owl,  
 like an owl among the ruins.  
 I lie awake; I have become  
 like a bird alone on a roof.  
 All day long my enemies taunt me;  
 those who rail against me use my name as a curse.  
 For I eat ashes as my food  
 and mingle my drink with tears  
 because of your great wrath,  
 for you have taken me up and thrown me aside.  
 My days are like the evening shadow;  
 I wither away like grass.*

Psalm 102:1-11

The psalmist's opening appeal is intense, personal, and on-going. It is apparent that he has languished in fear and isolation for some time. His urgent plea is for the Lord to pay attention. He needs answers and quickly! Those who pray the psalms are familiar with this cry for help (Ps 39:12; 54:2; 61:1; 64:1). It is common enough that we should expect to find ourselves in similar circumstances. We can put ourselves in the psalmist's place and learn from his example. Few may experience the intensity of Job's sufferings, who found himself on the ash heap, feverish and friendless, homeless and hounded, scraping his sores and mourning his losses. But all believers at some time or another find themselves in the psalmist's situation. Psalm 102 is for such times.

The psalmist flashes a series of images across the screen of our imagination to capture his suffering. He describes the horror of his unexplained suffering twelve different ways! He opens and closes his carefully crafted chiasmic description with a reference to "my days" going up in smoke and "my days" fleeting like the evening shadows (Ps 102:3,11). He withers away like the grass (Ps 102:4,11). "I forget to eat my food," parallels, "I eat ashes for my food" (Ps 102:4,9). He is feverish, emaciated, unable to sleep, groaning because of the pain, and weeping from despair. He feels like a lonely desert owl or a pelican far from the sea or a buzzard in the desert or a lost sparrow. Scholars cannot agree as to what kind of bird, but the meaning is clear. Added to the physical and emotional trauma is the constant barrage of taunts and slander coming from his enemies, who "use my name as a curse" (Ps 101:8).

The source of the psalmist's unexplained suffering is found in God who is sovereign over all of life and ultimately responsible for everything that happens. We have seen this reasoning before in the psalms where the sufferer pushes past immediate and secondary causes and brings his plight

directly to the Lord. This is not an implicit admission of sin and wrong doing, but rather a recognition of the psalmist's humble submission before God and a reflection of his dismay.<sup>88</sup>

The psalmist reminds us of Job who refused to face his suffering with the quiet resignation of a Stoic or with the disciplined passivity like a mystic or with the blind fatalism of a determinist. Job saw himself on trial but refused to put God on trial. He lashed out at God, like a son against his father or a daughter against her mother, but no matter how fierce the argument there is always an abiding relationship. Job fought against his suffering. He recognized evil as evil and felt it breathing down his neck (Job 10:1-2). The psalmist's twelve-fold description of suffering anticipates the anguish of Gethsemane, when he who was without sin contemplated being pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities (Isa 53:5). Psalm 102 is not far removed from Jesus' Gethsemane prayer and anticipates the cry from the cross, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34).

*But You, Lord*

*But you, Lord, sit enthroned forever;  
your renown endures through all generations.  
You will arise and have compassion on Zion,  
for it is time to show favor to her;  
the appointed time has come.  
For her stones are dear to your servants;  
her very dust moves them to pity.  
The nations will fear the name of the Lord,  
all the kings of the earth will revere your glory.  
For the Lord will rebuild Zion  
and appear in his glory.  
He will respond to the prayer of the destitute;  
he will not despise their plea.  
Let this be written for a future generation,  
that a people not yet created may praise the Lord:  
"The Lord looked down from his sanctuary on high,  
from heaven he viewed the earth,  
to hear the groans of the prisoners  
and release those condemned to death."  
So the name of the Lord will be declared in Zion  
and his praise in Jerusalem  
when the peoples and the kingdoms  
assemble to worship the Lord.*

Psalm 102:12-22

There is a decisive break and an abrupt change of tone as the psalmist moves from dark lamentation to bright hope and praise. The sharp contrast between the frailty and fleeting nature

---

<sup>88</sup> Ross, *Psalms*, vol. 3:217. Ross writes, "When he attributes his suffering to God's wrath, he is indicating that sin is the cause of his pain (even though he does not actually say that) and that God is in collusion with the enemies."

of human life and the eternal nature of the Lord's enduring throne is accentuated. The psalmist's confidence in the compassion, timing, and certainty of the Lord's deliverance catches the worshiper by surprise. We have gone from the depths of despair to the heights of praise "in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor 15:52). The psalmist's "my days" are contrasted with the Lord's eternal renown and rule. Although the psalmist's time may be slipping away, but the Lord's "appointed time has come" (Ps 102:13). One hears in Paul's statement an echo of this verse, "But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship" (Gal 4:4).

The psalmist's weakness and powerlessness are set in sharp relief to the Lord's power to intervene, to rebuild Zion, to gather the nations, and to respond to the prayer of the destitute. The psalmist envisions a great reversal in the future so "that a people not yet created may praise the Lord" (Ps 102:18). This hope lines up with Jesus' statement, "I am the good shepherd. . . .and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:14-16). The apostle Peter said it this way: "Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Pet 2:9).

By referring to the "prayer of the destitute" and "the groans of the prisoners" the psalmist integrates the opening lament with the promise of salvation. Zechariah's prophecy captures a similar integration of promise when he describes the coming of Zion's king "righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey" proclaiming peace to the nations, adding, "As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit. Return to your fortress, you prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much" (Zech 9:9-12). All of this adds up to a tremendous worship scene. The "peoples and the kingdoms" will gather to praise the name of the Lord in Zion. John the apostle described it this way: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever" (Rev 11:15).

### *My God, My Days*

*In the course of my life he broke my strength;  
he cut short my days.  
So I said:  
"Do not take me away, my God, in the midst of my days;  
your years go through all generations.  
In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth,  
and the heavens are the work of your hands.  
They will perish, but you remain;  
they will all wear out like a garment.  
Like clothing you will change them  
and they will be discarded.  
But you remain the same,  
and your years will never end.  
The children of your servants will live in your presence;*

*their descendants will be established before you.”*

Psalm 102:23-28

The psalmist contrasts his few short years with the Lord’s longevity, “your years go on through all generations” (Ps 102:24). Once again the sharp contrast between personal lament and divine hope are laid bare. The author of Hebrews sees much more going on here than the dying wish of a believer who faithfully clings to the everlasting promises of God. His eyes are fixed on Jesus, “the pioneer and perfecter of the faith, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, scorning the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2). As far as he is concerned “the whole psalm is Messianic, showing first the Messiah’s sufferings and dereliction (Ps 102:1-11), then his eager anticipation of the kingdom in its world-wide glory (Ps 102:12-22).”<sup>89</sup>

The tension running through the Psalm is a Messianic tension. The one who learned obedience by the things that he suffered (Heb 5:8) is the heir of all things, maker of the universe, and “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word” (Heb 1:2-3). The author of Hebrews places polar opposite truths, absolute transcendence and deep empathy, in radical juxtaposition. In Christ, we have a high priest who is both the Son of God and the Son of Man. The Incarnate One transcends his transcendence and takes on our weakness in every respect except without sin. He became “fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service of God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people” (Heb 2:17). As the ascended Lord, Jesus “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven” (Heb 1:3); as the Incarnate One, Jesus knows our needs, understands our temptations and empathizes with our weaknesses. “Sympathy with the sinner in his trial does not depend on the experience of sin which only the sinless can know in its full intensity. He who fails yields before the last strain.”<sup>90</sup>

For the psalmist, what keeps lament and hope bound together are the promises of God. For the believer Jesus Christ keeps them bound together. The psalmist concludes confidently. The world is passing away, “But you remain the same,” and the author of Hebrews concludes, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8).

---

<sup>89</sup> Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 363.

<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Bruce, *Hebrews*, 116.

Psalm 103 is “undoubtedly, one of the best-loved psalms” observed John Stott.<sup>91</sup> Spurgeon called it the Song on the Mount answering Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount. “Our attempt at exposition,” he wrote, “is commenced under an impressive sense of utter impossibility of doing justice to so sublime a composition...It is one of those all-comprehending Scriptures which is a Bible in itself, and it might alone almost suffice for the hymn book of the church.”<sup>92</sup> Psalm 103 is the inspiration to two of our great hymns, *Praise My Soul the King of Heaven* and *Praise the Lord, the Almighty*; as well as the song of praise, *Bless the Lord*. “Admiring gratitude shines through every line of this hymn to the God of all grace.”<sup>93</sup>

The psalm is pure praise. There are no petitions, only heartfelt reflections on the mercy of God. David begins the psalm personally, “Praise the Lord, O my soul.” He first addresses himself, exhorting his whole being to respond to God. Next, he expands the circle of praise to include the covenant community. Then he summons the whole of creation to “Praise the Lord.” He finishes full circle, ending where he began, with self-exhortation, “Praise the Lord, O my soul.” These three concentric circles of praise, personal, communal and universal, encompass the scope of true worship. “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord” (Ps 150:6).

The psalm's form and composition of praise is a testimony to the poet’s skill and creativity. Worship is not a haphazard, half-hearted effort that we make up willy nilly. George Herbert, the 17<sup>th</sup> Century poet-pastor, engaged in the work of worship “by all possible art.” He sought to convince his congregation of the truth of God through “earnestness speech,” a passionate attitude, and an effective delivery. The psalms share this attention to style and structure. Psalm 103 consists of twenty-two verses, as many verses as there are letters in the Hebrew alphabet. This “alphabetizing” of the message may have symbolized the poet’s desire to comprehend the essence of worship from A to Z. The psalmist is giving the ABC’s of true worship without “dumbing-down” the gospel.

There are three stanzas in this psalm. The first (Ps 103:1-5) and third (Ps 103:19-22) are nearly the same length, bracketing the central stanza (Ps 103:6-18). The whole Psalm is about God’s grace, which is received personally, revealed historically and extolled universally. An intentional pattern of repetition in each stanza reinforces the theme. The eightfold repetition of “my” highlights the personal emphasis in the first stanza and the fourfold “all” underscores the totality of God’s blessing. The repetition of “all” at the end further knits together the entire psalm. In the main portion of the psalm parallel lines add special emphasis: “the Lord is compassionate and gracious, // slow to anger, // and abounding in love;” and, “He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; // he does not treat us as our sins deserve // or repay us according to our iniquities” (Ps 103:8-10). The psalmist used three terms for disobedience: sins, iniquities, and transgressions, and three terms for those who practice obedience, those “who do his

---

<sup>91</sup> Stott, *Favorite Psalms*, 95.

<sup>92</sup> Spurgeon, “Psalm 103,” *Treasury of David*,

<sup>93</sup> Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 363.

bidding,” “who obey his word,” and “who do his will.”

The middle stanza is knit together by a series of comparisons. Thankfully the Lord does not treat us as our sins deserve nor pay us back for what we have done. We receive what we don’t deserve—God’s grace. His great love is compared to the height between heaven and earth, and the distance between east and west. The Lord’s compassion toward those who fear him is compared to a father’s compassion for his children. The Lord knows we are weak and frail. We are likened to dust, green grass and blooming flowers, but the Lord’s love is from everlasting to everlasting. His love is freely bestowed on “those who fear him,” “keep his covenant,” and “remember to obey his precepts.”

The name of Yahweh occurs eleven times in the twenty verses, twice in the first stanza, four times in the second, and five in the third as the psalm builds to a climax. This carefully crafted composition is more than a fine piece of poetry. Form and style serve a holy purpose – praise to the Lord. In the words of Henry Lyte,

*Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;  
To His feet thy tribute bring*

*Self Exhortation*

*Praise the Lord, my soul;  
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.  
Praise the Lord, my soul,  
and forget not all his benefits –  
who forgives all your sins  
and heals all your diseases,  
who redeems your life from the pit  
and crowns you with love and compassion,  
who satisfies your desires with good things  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.*

Psalm 103:1-5

Spurgeon said, “Soul music is the very soul of music. The psalmist strikes the best key note when he begins with stirring up his inmost self to magnify the Lord.”<sup>94</sup> The psalmist’s self-exhortation is critical for worship. Such positive and redemptive self-talk is essential for authentic worship. All real worship begins personally. We don’t feel our way into worship as much as worship our way into feelings. Worship begins with the conviction of self-exhortation. “Many talk freely enough to others, but never talk to themselves,” commented Spurgeon. “They are strangers to themselves – not on speaking terms with themselves – take no interest in their own souls – are dull and melancholy when alone.”<sup>95</sup> One measurement of emotional maturity is a person’s ability to reason and exhort themselves. Of course, not all self-talk is productive. We may be inclined to list our woes, dwell on our problems, fixate on our weaknesses, and withdraw into ourselves. This psalm leads us out of a narrow, constricted view of life, and into the large world of God’s

---

<sup>94</sup> Spurgeon, “Psalm 103,” *Treasury of David*.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

salvation.

The psalmist takes responsibility for what he says to himself, even as all believers must, knowing that our self-talk has an impact on others. Cynicism among the people of God can spread like a virus through gossip and negative comments. It doesn't take much to turn, "Praise the Lord, O my soul," into a critical spirit. Self-exhortation addressed to the soul speaks to "the inner core of the whole person."<sup>96</sup> The psalmist envisions the worshiper's conscience, imagination, emotions, memories, and hopes focused on praise. In a word, "soul" encompasses the breadth and depth of who we are. When David defined soul as "all my inmost being" he emphasized that our worship was derived from the inside out. To praise the Lord with our souls is to assure that our whole being worships the Lord.

The specific content of David's self-exhortation is God's amazing grace. Salvation is complete, encompassing the whole person. The first benefit of salvation is forgiveness, the foundation for our relationship with the Lord, followed by healing, redemption, empowerment, and fulfillment. The blessing of God's grace redeems every dimension of life. Holiness and health are God's blessing. *O my soul, praise him, for he is your health and salvation!*<sup>97</sup> Spiritual and emotional well-being are his gifts. Even in the midst of dire circumstances, we are comforted by the Lord's love and compassion. God blesses us with inner strength and outward energy. Worship begins by focusing on God and His action. The Lord forgives, heals, redeems, crowns (empowers), satisfies, and renews. It is not our activism, but God's action that inspires worship. "Yahweh is worthy of a total response of grateful worship for the totality of his blessing."<sup>98</sup>

David's inner dialogue reminds us of how important it is to use our mind and our memory to "shake off apathy or gloom" and rekindle our emotions for God.<sup>99</sup> Self-talk that is shaped by God's grace reminds us that "we can act ourselves into a new way of feeling much quicker than we can feel ourselves into a new way of acting."<sup>100</sup> It is like learning to play a musical instrument. We'll never enjoy playing an instrument until we practice. The hard work of discipline and the joy of devotion go hand-in-hand. "Worship is an act which develops feelings for God, not a feeling for God which is expressed in an act of worship. When we obey the command to praise God in worship, our deep, essential need to be in relationship with God is nurtured."<sup>101</sup> We worship because we are,

*Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,  
Evermore His praises sing. Alleluia!*<sup>102</sup>

*Salvation's Story*

*The Lord works righteousness  
and justice for all the oppressed.*

---

<sup>96</sup> Anderson, *On Being Human*, 177.

<sup>97</sup> Neander, "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty," 253.

<sup>98</sup> Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, 22.

<sup>99</sup> Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 364.

<sup>100</sup> Peterson, *A Long Obedience*, 50.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Lyte, "Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven," 1.

*He made known his ways to Moses,  
his deeds to the people of Israel:  
The Lord is compassionate and gracious,  
slow to anger, abounding in love.  
He will not always accuse,  
nor will he harbor his anger forever;  
he does not treat us as our sins deserve  
or repay us according to our iniquities.  
For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his love for those who fear him;  
as far as the east is from the west,  
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.  
As a father has compassion on his children,  
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;  
for he knows how we are formed,  
he remembers that we are dust.  
The life of mortals is like grass,  
they flourish like a flower of the field;  
the wind blows over it and it is gone,  
and its place remembers it no more.  
But from everlasting to everlasting  
the Lord's love is with those who fear him,  
and his righteousness with their children's children –  
with those who keep his covenant  
and remember to obey his precepts.*

Psalm 103:6-18

The psalmist moves from the personal benefits of salvation to the big picture of the history of salvation. The people of God respond to what the Lord has done and will do. *Let the amen sound from His people again!* If the first stanza is a solo call to worship, the second stanza is a powerful anthem of praise. The emphasis changes from personal salvation to the history of salvation among God's covenant people.

*Praise Him for His grace and favor  
To His people in distress;  
Praise Him still the same as ever,  
Slow to chide, and swift to bless. Alleluia!*

God's unfolding plan of salvation highlights the epicenter of redemption, the Exodus, the giving of the law at Mount Sinai, and the sacrificial system. Salvation history reveals his holy character, his enduring love, and our great need for salvation. When believers worship they take the grand themes of salvation and hold them up for praise out of joy and gratitude. We rehearse the full range of God's truth, past, present and future. We acknowledge our sinful frailty and the Lord's holiness and unfailing love.

*Father like He tends and spares us;  
Well our feeble frame He knows;  
In His hands He gently bears us,  
Rescues us from all our foes.<sup>103</sup>*

The psalmist celebrates the power of God's gracious forgiveness and deliverance from sin, by using spatial analogies to picture God's love; "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Ps 103:11-12). The apostle Paul echoed this spatial love language when prayed for believers "to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" (Eph 3:18).

Worship gives us a realistic and redemptive appraisal of our personal circumstances. Left to ourselves and our own opinions we may ignore the frailty of our human condition and neglect the love and mercy of God. We struggle to hold in tension the fleeting nature of mortal life and the promise of the Lord's everlasting love and life. The brevity of life does not mean the futility of life. "The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him" (Ps 103:15-17). In worship we are reminded that God redeems us from the pit. Our mortal bodies take on immortality, as the apostle Paul said, "The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power" (1 Cor 15:42-43). Corrie ten Boom, a survivor of the Nazi holocaust, offers a perspective on our mortality compatible with the psalmist:

"Often I have heard people say, 'How good God is. We prayed that it would not rain for our church picnic, and look at this lovely weather!' Yes, God is good when He sends good weather. But God was also good when He allowed my sister Betsie to starve to death before my eyes in the German concentration camp.

I remember one occasion when I was very discouraged there. Everything around us was dark, and there was darkness in my heart. I remember telling Betsie that I thought God had forgotten us. 'No, Corrie,' said Betsie, 'He has not forgotten us. Remember His Word: 'For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him; There is an ocean of God's love available. . . There is plenty for everyone. May God grant you never to doubt that victorious love, whatever the circumstances.'"<sup>104</sup>

Authentic corporate worship inspires our devotion to God, makes us more sensitive to sin (most of all our own), and deepens our passion for holiness. Worship has much more to do with being faithful than feeling good. As the psalmist emphasizes worship and ethics belong together: "The Lord's love is with those who fear him and his righteousness with their children's children – with

---

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ten Boom, *Clippings from My Notebook*, 79.

those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts” (Ps 103:17-18). This emphasis on righteous acts and obedience is clearly emphasized in the New Testament as well (see Eph 2:8-10). Goldingay writes, “Our relationship with God is wholly dependent on divine commitment, yet unless that meets with a response in the form of revering and thus obeying God, an actual relationship cannot come into being. It would be misleading to say that the divine commitment is conditional on the human response, because that would imply the relationship is a contract. But the commitment does require the response.”<sup>105</sup> Commenting on this text, Augustine took issue with those who prided themselves on memorizing the psalms, but neglected to obey the commands of God. It is better to do them than recite them, Augustine argued. It doesn't help to sing a hymn, but disobey God's will. “What good is it if your voice sings a hymn, if your life doesn't honor God?”<sup>106</sup> What is true of marriage can be said of worship and ethics, “What God has joined together let no one separate.”

### *Communal Exhortation*

*The Lord has established his throne in heaven,  
and his kingdom rules over all.  
Praise the Lord, you his angels,  
you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word.  
Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts,  
you his servants who do his will.  
Praise the Lord all his works  
everywhere in his dominion.  
Praise the Lord, my soul.*

Psalm 103:19-22

Psalm 103 reminds believers that those who worship God in spirit and in truth bow before King Jesus. The third stanza widens the circle of praise to include all of creation. All the angels and the heavenly hosts are summoned to worship before the throne of him who rules over all. Total praise. There are no spectators. Everyone is in the choir and everything is centered around the throne of the Lord. "Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in his dominion." The end of Psalm 103 reminds us of something out of Revelation: “Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!’” (Rev 5:13).

This powerful, pulsating praise has practical implications for our worship. For a number of years now churches have been designing worship according to people's preferences. Everyone it seems has an opinion about what kind of music and liturgy they like. However, it is important to note that whatever your perspective on worship styles, whether you like to rock out on songs of praise or sing ancient hymns, in the end we'll be worshipping together. We will not find separate worship services in heaven. Those of us who have strong opinions about what kind of worship

---

<sup>105</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 3:177.

<sup>106</sup> Augustine, *Psalms*, 509.

music will be in heaven, may be surprised and stretched! It is probably a good idea to begin preparing on this side of eternity for the unimaginable range of praise we will experience in heaven.

It is even more exciting to contemplate the inclusiveness of the global gospel of Jesus Christ. Everyone everywhere is called to worship the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is only one Creator, Redeemer and King, only one throne and only one kingdom over all. Modern multiculturalism envisions a chorus of “We are the world” but biblical universalism envisions the throne of God surrounded by angels and the heavenly hosts praising God. Worship acknowledges the rule of the Lord over every culture, tribe, nation, and people group. The key concept for the future of the human community is not ideological pluralism, but doxology:

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise him, all creatures here below;  
Praise him above, ye heav’nly host;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Biblical universalism exalts “one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:5-6). Psalm 103 reminds us “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:10-11). The psalm ends where it began with personal exhortation to worship. No matter how many join the concert of praise, our soul’s praise to the Lord still counts.

*Angels, help us to adore Him:  
Ye behold Him face to face;  
Sun and moon, bow down before Him,  
Dwellers all in time and space.  
Alleluia! Alleluia! Praise with us the God of grace.<sup>107</sup>*

---

<sup>107</sup> Lyte, “Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven,” 1.

Psalm 104 is a fitting *response* to Psalm 103. The greatness of God in creation is best understood in the light of the goodness of God in salvation. Without the Redeemer it is impossible to truly worship the Creator. These two psalms begin and end with doxology, “Praise the Lord, my soul” (Ps 103:1, 22; 104:1, 35). The benefits of salvation are celebrated in Psalm 103 and the works of creation are extolled in Psalm 104. The relationship between Creator and creature depends on the redemptive relationship between Father and child – “As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him” (Ps 103:13). Karl Barth claimed that we can only know the God of Creation by knowing the God of Redemption.

“I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. When we approach the truth which the Christian Church confesses in the word ‘Creator’, then everything depends on our realizing that we find ourselves here, as well, confronted by the mystery of faith, in respect of which knowledge is real solely through God’s revelation . . . . We are not nearer to believing in God the Creator, than we are to believing that Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. . . . It is impossible to separate the knowledge of God the Creator and of His work from the knowledge of God’s dealings with man. Only when we keep before us what the triune God has done for us in Jesus Christ can we realize what is involved in God the Creator and His work.”<sup>108</sup>

The salvation psalm is a necessary precursor to the creation psalm, even as Psalm 104 is an *essential* response to Psalm 103. The gospel of King Jesus is not an other-worldly spiritual ideal that separates the believer from the real world of weather and geology, biology and agriculture, water and animal husbandry. The beauty of the gospel is its impact on all of creation from what we put up in space to the air quality coming out of our smoke stacks. The psalmist makes sure we don’t write off creation as a theatrical stage – a mere facade for the drama of redemption.

The notion that God created the cosmos like a well-made Swiss watch and then left it running on its own is attributed to Cambridge educated William Palley, an English pastor and abolitionist, who in 1802 wrote *Natural Theology*. Palley made a case for the teleological argument for the existence of God. The design of the universe, he reasoned, proved that there was a Designer, an intelligent Creator. He began his apologetic discourse with an analogy: “In crossing a heath I hit my foot on a stone, and if I were asked how that stone came to be there, I might answer that for all I knew it had laid there forever. . . . But suppose I had found a watch on the ground, and I was asked how that watch happened to be in that place. . . .” For Palley the watch was analogous to creation’s intricate systems such as the human eye or an animal’s skeletal structure of muscles, ligaments, and bones. Palley’s reasoned and reverential worship of nature’s Maker is consistent with Psalm 104, even if mocked by nature alone evolutionists. His watchmaker analogy was co-opted by nineteenth century Deists who argued that God set everything in motion and then let the forces of nature take over. Deism they argued was compatible with Darwinian evolution.

<sup>108</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 50,52.

*Lord of the Universe, Hope of the World*<sup>109</sup>

*Praise the Lord, my soul.  
Lord my God, you are very great;  
you are clothed with splendor and majesty.  
The Lord wraps himself in light as with a garment;  
he stretches out the heavens like a tent  
and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters.  
He makes winds his messengers,  
flames of fire his servants.  
Psalm 104:1-4*

The prelude to this hymn of praise establishes the greatness of the Lord God. The psalmist uses metaphor to describe the dynamic relationship between the Lord and his creation. Far from being a rival power, nature in all of its splendor and majesty is worn like a royal robe, a garment of light, thrown over the shoulders as the Lord stretches out the heavens like a tent. In a few poetic lines the psalmist refutes the Egyptian hymn to Aten, the sun god, and declares Yahweh's transcendence over the Baal myth.<sup>110</sup>

The imagery of dazzling light recalls the Genesis account, "And God said, 'Let there be light'" (Gen 1:3), and the description in Hebrews of the Son as "the radiance of God's glory" (Heb 1:3) and the apostle John's vision of one like the Son of Man whose "face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance" (Rev 1:16). The psalmist paints a picture filled with light and energy and motion. There is nothing static about this introduction to the Lord of the universe. The dynamic is captured in Walter Chalmers Smith's hymn, "Immortal, Invisible, God only Wise."

In light inaccessible hid from our eyes – verse 1  
Unresting, unchanging, and silent as light – verse 2  
'Tis only the splendor of light hideth Thee! – verse 4<sup>111</sup>

The author of Hebrews sets the Son apart from angels when he quotes from the Greek translation (LXX) of Psalm 104:4: "He makes his angels spirits, and his servants flames of fire." Whether the Lord is using wind and fire to carry out his purposes or angels, the Son, "who is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being," (Heb 1:3), transcends and commands everything in creation.<sup>112</sup> "His sovereignty is unfathomable: he is surrounded by his servants, for everything he has made in the heavens and on earth stands ready to do his will, to be his messengers and the agents of carrying out his will."<sup>113</sup> The second stanza of Robert Grant's "O Worship the King" draws from Psalm 104:

O tell of his might and sing of his grace,  
Whose robe is the light, whose canopy is space.

---

<sup>109</sup> Clarkson, "Lord of the Universe, Hope of the Word."

<sup>110</sup> Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, 28-29; Ross, *Psalms*, vol. 3:245.

<sup>111</sup> Smith, "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise," 33.

<sup>112</sup> Okorochoa, "Psalms," 708.

<sup>113</sup> Ross, *Psalms*, vol. 3:249.

His chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds form,  
And dark is His path on the wings of the storm.<sup>114</sup>

*Creation's Maker and Sustainer*

*He set the earth on its foundations;  
it can never be moved.  
You covered it with the watery depths as with a garment;  
the waters stood above the mountains.  
But at your rebuke the waters fled,  
at the sound of your thunder they took to flight;  
they flowed over the mountains,  
they went down into the valleys,  
to the place you assigned for them.  
You set a boundary they cannot cross;  
never again will they cover the earth.  
He makes springs pour water into the ravines;  
it flows between the mountains.  
They give water to all the beasts of the field;  
the wild donkeys quench their thirst.  
The birds of the sky nest by the waters;  
they sing among the branches.  
He waters the mountains from the upper chambers;  
the land is satisfied by the fruit of his work.  
He makes grass grow for the cattle,  
and plants for people to cultivate –  
bringing forth food from the earth:  
wine that gladdens human hearts,  
oil to make their faces shine,  
and bread that sustains their hearts.  
The trees of the Lord are well watered,  
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.  
There the birds make their nests;  
the stork has its home in the junipers.  
The high mountains belong to the wild goats;  
the crags are a refuge for the hyrax.  
He made the moon to mark the seasons,  
and the sun knows when to go down.  
You bring darkness, it becomes night,  
and all the beasts of the forest prowl.  
The lions roar for their prey  
and seek their food from God.  
The sun rises, and they steal away;  
they return and lie down in their dens.*

---

<sup>114</sup> Grant, "O Worship the King," 104.

*Then the people go out to their work,  
to their labor until evening.*

Psalm 104:5-23

The poet leaves plenty of room for the scientist to explore and explain. His aim is worship. He is more interested in showing the character of the one who creates and sustains nature than he is in the science behind natural phenomena. Yet, far from discouraging the scientist, the psalmist's artistic and emotive metaphors serve to inspire. Like a builder God sets the earth on its foundations. Like a mother covering her children with a blanket, God spreads out the oceans. Like a farmer he provides grass for cattle. God is at the center of how the universe works, not as *deus ex machina* or God at the point of our ignorance, but the Lord whose character is found in nature's order, in the wild donkey's quenched thirst, and in the mountain goat's craggy castle.

The rhyme and reason behind all of this is divine providence, not blind chance and fate. The Creator's wisdom and beauty is manifest everywhere. Springs of water, singing birds, and seasons marked by the journey of the moon, are all evidence of God's sustaining grace. Like a good host God has thought of everything, wine and bread to gladden human hearts and the balm of Gilead for health. From sun up to sun down the Lord shows he cares for his creation. Nocturnal animals hunt for food and at daybreak people go out to work. The order and rhythm of creation inspires the psalmist's commentary on Genesis. He agrees: "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Gen 1:31).

Echoes of Psalm 104 occur throughout the Jesus' ministry. God's large scale handiwork is made manifest on a smaller more intimate scale when Jesus "rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!'" (Mark 4:39; see Ps 104:7). It is there as well, at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, when Jesus changed the water to wine and then on the far side of the sea of Galilee when he fed the more than five thousand (John 2:1-12; 6:1-13; see Ps 104:15). In the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus said, "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them," we are reminded of the psalm (Matthew 6:26; Ps 104:12). Psalm 104 is reflected in the life and ministry of Jesus and prepares us for the theology articulated by the apostle Paul (Col 1:15-17). Four lines from Margaret Clarkson's hymn shape our imagination in the truth of Christ: "Lord of the limitless reaches of space // Lord of the infinite eons of time // Send out your light to the ends of the earth! // How your creation cries out for release!"<sup>115</sup>

#### *God's Creation Care*

*How many are your works, Lord!  
In wisdom you made them all;  
the earth is full of your creatures.  
There is the sea, vast and spacious,  
teeming with creatures beyond number –  
living things both large and small.  
There the ships go to and fro,*

---

<sup>115</sup> Clarkson, "Lord of the Universe, Hope of the World."

*and Leviathan, which you formed to frolic there.*  
*All creatures look to you*  
*to give them their food at the proper time.*  
*When you give it to them,*  
*they gather it up;*  
*when you open your hand,*  
*they are satisfied with good things.*  
*When you hide your face,*  
*they are terrified;*  
*When you take away their breath,*  
*they die and return to the dust.*  
*When you send your Spirit,*  
*they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.*

Psalm 104:24-30

The sea is often described in the Bible as a threat that inspires fear, but in Psalm 104 it is a picture of the Lord's vast and amazing creativity. The earth and sea are teeming with life. Leviathan, the mythic sea monster, is pictured as a playful whale frolicking in the ocean. Cargo laden ships are navigating sea routes. And over it all, earth and sea and every living creature, God is sovereign. The psalmist sees the world as called into existence by the will and word of God. The author of Hebrews echoes this conviction: "By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible" (Heb 11:3).

All of creation is dependent on the Lord's care and provision. The complex food chain is pictured in God's open handed provision and the gift of life and breath depends upon the Lord turning his face towards his creatures. Life is unsustainable apart from the active and personal involvement of the Lord. "To modern ears it all sounds naive," writes John Stott, "But the truth behind the figures stands. . . .No Christian can have a mechanistic view of nature. The universe is not a machine which operates by inflexible laws, nor has God made laws to which he is himself now a slave."<sup>116</sup>

"Every living thing is an elaboration on a single original plan," writes Bill Bryson. "It cannot be said too often: all life is one. That is, and I suspect will forever prove to be, the most profound true statement there is."<sup>117</sup> The unity of nature is miraculous. We are awed that human beings are so closely related to fruits and vegetables and that over 60 percent of human genes are the same as those in fruit flies. The scientific view of the human person is inevitably and understandably reductionistic, breaking down the person into component parts, reading DNA, mapping genomes, and discovering proteomes. But all evidence in this vast universe bears the fingerprint of her Creator and Sustainer. All things are sustained moment by moment by this powerful word (Heb 1:3).

---

<sup>116</sup> Stott, *Favorite Psalms*, 101.

<sup>117</sup> Bryson, *A Short History of Nearly Everything*, 415.

*Life is Sacramental*

*May the glory of the Lord endure forever;  
may the Lord rejoice in his works –  
he who looks at the earth, and it trembles,  
who touches the mountains and they smoke.  
I will sing to the Lord all my life;  
I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.  
May my meditation be pleasing to him,  
as I rejoice in the Lord.  
But may sinners vanish from the earth  
and the wicked be no more.  
Praise the Lord, my soul.  
Praise the Lord. Psalm 104:31-35*

The psalmist ends where he began by extolling the glory of God. His poetic meditation on creation has only served to enhance our grasp of the transcendence and majesty of God. Our reverential fear for the awesome power of God has only deepened. The psalmist vows to glorify God as long as he lives and he prays that his meditation and reflection on life will be pleasing to God. There is a sacramental cast to life. The psalmist is life-affirming, rather than life-rejecting. He is focused on “life’s positive riches,” reveling in the beauty, truth, and love derived from the Divine Nature.<sup>118</sup>

The psalmist’s focus is on the dynamic beauty and energy of God’s creation, but he is not naive when it comes to “nature red in tooth and claw.” Lions roar for the prey and earthquakes happen (Ps 104:21, 32), but the psalmist prefers to marvel and embrace the wonders of creation and worship his Creator.<sup>119</sup> Only one short sober sentence brings us back to Psalm 103 and our great need for redemption: “But may sinners vanish from the earth and the wicked be no more” (Ps 104:35). The psalmist acknowledges our fallen human condition, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23).

A deeply disturbing apocalyptic narrative streams live across our imagination and threatens to compete with the inspiration of Psalm 104. The psalmist’s ratio of positive to negative is instructive, but with the realities of nuclear proliferation, global warming, internet-deception campaigns, and terrorism, it is a tough competition. The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists has set the Doomsday Clock, the marker of how close humanity is to a civilization-threatening catastrophe, at two minutes to midnight.<sup>120</sup> Jesus’ Prayer Book is honest with what threatens ourselves and our planet. To pray the psalms is to become well acquainted with human frailty, depravity, and mortality. But in the midst of all that hard news, the ratio of grace supercedes doom and gloom. The psalmist inspires our self-exhortation, “Praise the Lord, my soul. Praise the Lord.”

---

<sup>118</sup> Blamires, *The Christian Mind*, 173.

<sup>119</sup> Allen, *Psalms 101-150*, 34.

<sup>120</sup> <https://thebulletin.org/2018-doomsday-clock-statement>

The reason for exploring salvation (Ps 103), creation (Ps 104), covenant (Ps 105), and confession (Ps 106) is the expressed purpose of praise. Each of the four psalms begins and ends with praise. Self-exhortation, “Praise the Lord, *my soul*,” inspires a communal response of praise to the Lord. This four movement symphony of praise arouses the people of God to worship the Lord for his saving grace, his sovereign care, his covenant faithfulness, and his steadfast love and mercy.

Psalm 105 begins with a vigorous call to action. The servants of God are summoned to do the work of worship by a blitz of action verbs. All the singing, glorying, telling, seeking, and rejoicing revolves around remembering God’s wonderful works. It is not about what believers have done but what God has done and is doing. The work of remembering recalls a history of the Lord’s covenant promises beginning with Abraham and ending with Joshua. In this psalm, Israel’s rebellious and wayward ways are forgotten for a moment and only the Lord’s great faithfulness is remembered. Psalm 106 tells the other side of the story.

*Remember His Wonderful Acts*

*Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name;  
make known among the nations what he has done.  
Sing to him, sing praise to him;  
tell of all his wonderful acts.  
Glory in his holy name;  
let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.  
Look to the Lord and his strength;  
seek his face always.  
Remember the wonders he has done,  
his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced,  
you his servants, the descendants of Abraham,  
his chosen ones, the children of Jacob.*

Psalm 105:1-6

The psalmist knows that we are not primarily thinkers or believers but lovers. Real worship, the kind of worship envisioned by the psalmist, shapes and transforms our identities “by forming our most fundamental desires and our most basic attunement to the world. . . .What defines us is what we love.”<sup>121</sup> The call to worship given in Psalm 105 calls for action from the body up and from the head down. A string of lively imperatives call for active agents of praise and proclamation. Intense intentionality coupled with a keen sense of ultimacy characterizes the outward looking worship and mission of a people devoted to God. The global reach of the message is united with the intimacy of the heart seeking the Lord. The narrow minded spectator is out of place in this assembly of globally-minded worshipers bent on energetic and thoughtful praise.

The psalmist’s first concern is for worship to be God-centered. It is the Lord whose name is

<sup>121</sup> Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 25.

proclaimed, whose deeds are made known, and whose wonderful acts are celebrated. Worship is centering because the people of God proclaim his name, sing to him, tell of his acts, glory in his holy name, and remember his wonders, his miracles, and his judgments. “In worship God gathers his people to himself as center: ‘The Lord reigns’ (Ps 93:1). Worship is a meeting at the center so that our lives are centered in God and not lived eccentrically. We worship so that we live in response to and from this center, the living God.”<sup>122</sup>

The psalmist’s second concern is for worship to “make known among the nations what he has done” (Ps 105:1). The goal of worship is consistent with Yahweh’s promise to Abraham, “and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:3), and with Jesus’ Great Commission (Matthew 28:19). Paul’s emphasis on intelligible worship also fits the psalmist’s concern: “Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will be speaking into the air” (1 Cor 14:9). This second concern is inseparable from the first and is essential if the nations are going to hear of the Lord’s wonderful acts. Worship and mission form a positive, dynamic tension, each serving as an energizing and motivating catalyst for the other. Both sides of the equation work equally well. We can worship our way into mission and mission our way into worship. Mission produces a powerful incentive to worship because both mission and worship are centered in God. Worship reminds us that “mission is not ours; mission is God’s.” We worship the triune God who is on a mission and when we worship we are reminded, “it is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world but that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission—God’s mission.”<sup>123</sup>

The psalmist identifies the worshipers as the Lord’s “servants, the descendants of Abraham, his chosen ones, the children of Jacob” (Ps 105:6). This description is good news for all those who have accepted Jesus as the Messiah. In the past the Jewish identity was tied to circumcision, never to race and ritual, but now it is rooted in faith. As the apostle Paul explained, “Scripture foresaw that God would justify Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’ So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith” (Gal 3:8-9). “A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person’s praise is not from other people, but from God” (Rom 2:28-29). The true children of Abraham received Christ the Messiah to the Jews and the Savior of the world.

“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:26-29).

Psalm 105 covers the early chapters of our family history. For all those who in Christ this is our

---

<sup>122</sup> Peterson, *Reversed Thunder*, 60.

<sup>123</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 62.

story, too. We are servants of the Lord, descendants of Abraham, chosen by God, and children of Jacob. Everybody has a story, but only one story redeems our story. It is the story of the one who came who was greater than Abraham, greater than Joseph, and greater than Moses.

When the psalmist told the story of salvation history only half of it could be told. Much more was yet to come. But now we have a fuller story to tell to the nations to turn their hearts to the Lord. The call of Abraham and the patriarchal journey, the story of Joseph and Egyptian bondage, the Exodus and the conquest of the promised land, are all wonderful acts of protection, provision, deliverance, guidance, and redemption. These miracles and wonders – these redemptive analogies – need to be remembered, along with all that has happened since. In the coming of Jesus Christ, in answer to all the promises and prophecies, the salvation story reached its fulfillment, not yet its culmination, but its climax, in the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. If the people of God had a wonderful story to tell more than thousand years before Jesus was born, how much more do the people of God today have a story to tell. Today, we await the King with even greater reasons to worship and even greater news to share.

### *His Everlasting Covenant*

*He is the Lord our God;  
his judgments are in all the earth.  
He remembers his covenant forever,  
the promises he made, for a thousand generations,  
the covenant he made with Abraham,  
the oath he swore to Isaac.  
He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree,  
to Israel as an everlasting covenant:  
“To you I will give the land of Canaan  
as the portion you will inherit.”*

Psalm 105:7-11

The psalmist declares, “He is Yahweh our God!” This is the truth around which every promise, prophecy, and purpose is centered. The Lord is no tribal deity, no ethnic god, no regional myth. His judgments are in all the earth. The Lord is the Savior of the world (Ps 103) and the Creator of the cosmos (Ps 104) and the Lord of history. The psalmist emphasizes the Lord’s *everlasting* covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in two parallel lines. “Forever” is equal to “a thousand generations.” Augustine explains that one thousand is a symbolic number, “because the solid square of the number ten, ten times ten, and this taken ten times amounts to a thousand” signifies the eternal inheritance of those who live by faith in the covenant promises of God.<sup>124</sup> For the Lord

---

<sup>124</sup> Augustine, *Psalm 105*, 521. In the Book of Revelation there is a threefold reference to the one thousand years of protection for the people of God (Rev 20:1-7). One thousand (10 x 10 x 10) is a figurative number for the ideal church age extending from Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and ascension to Christ’s second coming. During that time Satan’s influence persists but his power is limited. Beale, *Revelation*, 995. Beale summarizes his argument: “That this is not a literal chronological number is apparent from: (1) the consistently figurative use of numbers elsewhere in the book, (2) the figurative nature of much of the immediate context (“chain,” “abyss,” “dragon,” “serpent,” “locked,” “sealed,” “beast”), (3) the predominantly figurative tone of the entire book (1:1), (4) the figurative use of “1,000” in the OT [and the NT, see Deut 32:30; Joshua 23:10; Job 9:3; 33:23; Ecclesiastes 7:28; Isaiah 30:17; 2 Peter 3:8], and (5) the use in Jewish and early Christian writings of “1,000” years as a figure for the eternal blessing of the redeemed.”

to remember his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, means that he acts on the promise to give the land “as the portion you will inherit” (Ps 105:11). All three dimensions of the covenant, its everlastingness, its patriarchal principals, and its pledge of the land, converge when Jesus responds to the faith of the centurion, “Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. I say to you that many will come from the east and from the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 8:10-11). The promise of the land is fulfilled and transcended in the global reach of the gospel.<sup>125</sup> For Augustine, “This is everlasting inheritance,”<sup>126</sup> Christ’s followers have an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. This inheritance fulfills and transcends the covenant promises given to Israel. It is no longer tied to the land or to political autonomy.<sup>127</sup> “The notion of a holy land is superseded by that of a holy community (1 Pet 2:4-10).<sup>128</sup> This is the inheritance Jesus promised when he said:

“Truly I tell you, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields – along with persecutions – and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first”(Mark 10:29-31).

The promise of a homeland (Gen 12:1-5) is “central to understanding the plan of redemption.” Tim Keller explains, “We long for a home, a place of security, comfort, and love. We were made for a world without death or parting from love, a world in which we walked with God and knew him face to face. The world has been marred by sin and is no longer home, and we are restless exiles since our expulsion from Eden. So when the Son of God came he had no place to lay his head (Luke 9:58) and was crucified outside the city. He took the great exile we deserved so we could be brought into God’s household (Eph 2:17-19). And someday he will turn the world back into home indeed (Rev 21:1-8).”<sup>129</sup>

### *His Protection*

*When they were but few in number,  
few indeed, and strangers in it,  
they wandered from nation to nation,  
from one kingdom to another.  
He allowed no one to oppress them;  
for their sake he rebuked kings:*

---

<sup>125</sup> The dispensational template interprets the Bible dualistically. Instead of seeing the promises to Israel fulfilled in the church and in the one new humanity created in Christ Jesus, dispensationalists argue that God has a separate destiny for Israel that involves reconstituting the nation, repatriating the land, and restoring the temple. God’s promises to ethnic Jews will be fulfilled after the church is raptured, when Israel turns to her Messiah during the great tribulation. This interpretative template calls for two new covenants, one for Israel and one for the church; two different Last Days, one for Israel and one for the church; Christ’s return comes in two stages, the rapture and the second coming; and there are two final judgments, the judgment seat of Christ and the final great white throne judgment. This dualism depends on a template imposed on the Bible, rather than a straight-forward reading of the biblical text.

<sup>126</sup> Augustine, *Psalms* 105, 522.

<sup>127</sup> Webster, *Outposts of Hope*, 29.

<sup>128</sup> Elliott, *1 Peter*, 336.

<sup>129</sup> Keller, *The Songs of Jesus*, 265.

*“Do not touch my anointed ones;  
do my prophets no harm.”  
He called down famine on the land  
and destroyed all their supplies of food;  
and he sent a man before them –  
Joseph, sold as a slave.  
They bruised his feet with shackles,  
his neck was put in irons,  
till what he foretold came to pass,  
till the word of the Lord proved him true.  
The king sent and released him,  
the ruler of peoples set him free.  
He made him master of his household,  
ruler over all he possessed,  
To instruct his princes as he pleased  
and teach his elders wisdom.*

Psalm 105:12-22

The psalmist sketches the story of Genesis from Abraham to Joseph. He compresses half the Book of Genesis and several hundred years into eleven poetic verses. But he does not fail to stress the homeless vulnerability of the patriarchs, their divine protection, and the Lord's sovereign direction. The Lord secured the people of God with a protective warning, “Do not touch my anointed ones.” He guarded these resident aliens as they wandered from nation to nation. The world called them nomads and strangers, but the Lord called them his anointed ones; his prophets. He saw them as his chosen ones. They were his embodied testimony to the nations.

In tandem with calling down a famine, the Lord sends a man before them – Joseph, sold as a slave. The psalmist provides additional commentary to the Genesis account of Joseph's journey from Canaan to Egypt. His feet and neck are shackled and he is caged like an animal until “the word of the Lord proved him true” (Ps 105:19). The sending and the suffering of Joseph, a person defined by the word of God, makes him a type pointing forward to Jesus Christ. One who the world despised, became a ruler of peoples, a master of the king's household, and an instructor of princes. And all of this was the Lord's doing!

#### *His Deliverance*

*Then Israel entered Egypt;  
Jacob resided as a foreigner in the land of Ham.  
The Lord made his people very fruitful;  
he made them too numerous for their foes,  
whose hearts he turned to hate his people,  
to conspire against his servants.  
He sent Moses his servant,  
and Aaron, whom he had chosen.  
They performed his signs among them,*

*his wonders in the land of Ham.  
 He sent darkness and made the land dark –  
 for had they not rebelled against his words?  
 He turned their waters into blood,  
 causing their fish to die.  
 Their land teemed with frogs,  
 which went up into the bedrooms of their rulers.  
 He spoke, and there came swarms of flies,  
 and gnats throughout their land;  
 he struck down their vines and fig trees  
 and shattered the trees of their country.  
 He spoke, and the locusts came,  
 grasshoppers without number;  
 they ate up every green thing in their land,  
 ate up the produce of the soil.  
 Then he struck down all the firstborn in their land,  
 the firstfruits of all their manhood.  
 He brought out Israel, laden with silver and gold,  
 and from among the tribes no one faltered.  
 Egypt was glad they left,  
 because dread of Israel had fallen on them.*

Psalm 105:23-38

Israel's resident alien status continues with Joseph's family fleeing to Egypt because of the famine. The psalmist's line, "Jacob resided as a foreigner in the land of Ham," underscores Israel's refuge status. They came in search of food. Their future looked hopeless, but "the Lord made his people very fruitful" (Ps 105:24). First, they were pitied by the Egyptians because they were weak and vulnerable, but over time their families grew and flourished. Then, they were perceived as a threat and hated by the Egyptians. The worshiper may be surprised that the psalmist credits the sovereign Lord with both the famine and the Egyptian change of heart. The Lord turned their hearts to hate his people! The covenant people of God do not have the luxury of secondary causes and second guessing. The Lord is sovereign over all. "In Israel's historiography," writes Patrick Reardon, "all is theology."<sup>130</sup> For "we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28).

Like Joseph, Moses the Lord's servant was *sent* along with Aaron to perform the Lord's "signs among them" (Ps 105:27). The initiative and the action belong to the Lord. It is his *sending* that sets these two representatives apart as types foreshadowing the coming of the sent One (John 3:34; 1 John 4:9-10). And with the sending of Moses, the Lord sent "signs" and "wonders" (plagues) among the Egyptians. The psalmist describes eight of the ten plagues, leaving out the fifth plague against the livestock and the sixth plague of boils. He begins the sequence with the ninth plague of darkness and offers this reason for the judgment: "For had they not rebelled

<sup>130</sup> Reardon, *Christ in the Psalms*, 207.

against his [the Lord's] words?" (Ps 105:28). The psalmist ends with the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn sons. "These two frame all of the other plagues with their significance for judgment, first on the sun god and then on Pharaoh."<sup>131</sup>

Israel did not escape Egypt through their own courage and wisdom. The Lord delivered them. The Lord "brought out Israel, laden with silver and gold, and from among their tribes no one faltered" (Ps 105:37). The psalmist illustrates the completeness of the deliverance in three ways: Israel did not leave Egypt empty handed; the solidarity of Israel remained unbroken; and "the dread of Israel" fell on Egypt. The Lord's victory was material, spiritual, and emotional.

### *His Faithfulness*

*He spread out a cloud as a covering,  
and a fire to give light at night.  
They asked, and he brought them quail;  
he fed them well with the bread of heaven.  
He opened the rock, and water gushed out;  
it flowed like a river in the desert.  
For he remembered his holy promise  
given to his servant Abraham.  
He brought out his people with rejoicing,  
his chosen ones with shouts of joy;  
he gave them the lands of the nations,  
and they fell heir to what others had toiled for –  
that they might keep his precepts  
and observe his laws.  
Praise the Lord.*

Psalm 105:39-45

The psalmist has made his point, the Lord has honored his everlasting covenant with Israel and he is worthy of all praise. His protection, deliverance and faithfulness are everywhere evident in the specific details and in the grand sweep of Israel's history. His sketch of the Israel's trek through the wilderness and the conquest of the promised land are only briefly mentioned. The psalmist credits the Lord's provision of food, water, and guidance to his commitment to honor his promise to Abraham. "For he remembered his holy promise given to his servant Abraham" (Ps 105:42). The psalmist doesn't actually come out and say, "And what more shall I say? I don't have time to tell about . . ." (Heb 11:32), but he leaves that impression. He closes with a spirited description of joyful deliverance, abundant blessing, and renewed obedience to the will of God.

*“Remember this! He led his people out singing for joy;  
his chosen people marched, singing their hearts out!  
He made them a gift of the country they entered,  
helped them seize the wealth of the nations  
So they could do everything he told them –*

---

<sup>131</sup> Ross, *Psalms*, vol. 3:269.

could follow his instructions to the letter.

Hallelujah!”

Psalm 105:43-45 The Message

Psalm 105 and 106 form a diptych, a two panel work of art that is meant *literally* to hang together. These two long psalms are dedicated to the great faithfulness of the Lord and his covenant love. Salvation history bears witness to God's sustaining grace from the call of Abraham to the conquest of the promised land. Yahweh is worthy of all praise for remembering and acting on his holy promise to his servant Abraham (Ps 105:42). In Psalm 105 there is an intentional omission, little is said about human ingratitude and rebellion. The focus is entirely on external threats to the patriarchs and the Israelites in Egypt and the Lord's protection, provision and deliverance. The inspiration for praise is the Lord's steadfast love overcoming unsurmountable obstacles to sustain his people in spite of outside opposition.

Psalm 106 retraces this same history, but this time the focus is on the many ways the people of God resisted the will of the Lord and rejected his love and mercy. Psalm 105 is a eulogy, recounting the blessings of God; Psalm 106 is a confession, recounting the waywardness of Israel. But the theme and purpose of both Psalms leads the worshiper in joyful praise because of the Lord's great faithfulness. The apostle Paul made reference to "a trustworthy saying" in the early church: "If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself" (2 Tim 2:11-13). Both Psalm 106 and the early church's saying emphasize the Lord's faithfulness in the midst of our wilfulness and weakness.

The opening and closing sections (Ps 106:1-5; 47-48) are critical for defining this final psalm of Book IV as a psalm of praise and placing the long middle section in perspective (Ps 106:6-46). It is important to take in the movement of the whole psalm so as not to turn Psalm 106 into simply a survey of the Old Testament. A verse by verse exposition of the psalm, which references all the Old Testament texts alluded to in the psalm, may be valuable in explaining the text, but such a method does not necessarily bring out the purpose and the power of the psalm. It is easy to get lost in historical detail if we give the same weight to each verse and do not allow the momentum of the psalm to carry us along. The lengthy confession describes seven incidents, all of which are woeful acts of disobedience (Ps 106:6-33), followed by an eighth case study in evil with a seven-fold description of outrageous paganization (Ps 106:34-39). The psalmist orchestrates a dark crescendo that leaves the people of God without excuse and presents in bold relief the Lord's faithfulness to his holy promises – his everlasting covenant.

### *Shared Joy*

*Praise the Lord. [Hallelujah!]  
Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;  
his love endures forever.  
Who can proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord  
or fully declare his praise?  
Blessed are those who act justly,  
who always do what is right.*

*Remember me, Lord, when you show favor to your people,  
come to my aid when you save them,  
that I may enjoy the prosperity of your chosen ones,  
that I may share in the joy of your nation  
and join your inheritance in giving praise.*

Psalm 106:1-5

The psalmist's personal passion for praise is evident from the outset. These opening verses reflect Asaph's prayer when the ark of the covenant was brought into Jerusalem (1 Chron 16) as well as Jeremiah's hopeful prophecy for the return of the exiles to the land of Judah (Jer 33:10-11). The psalmist draws from and contributes to a rich tradition of worship that combines praise, thanksgiving, and humility. This invitation to praise recalls Psalm 15's "liturgy at the gate" – the worship protocol of personal preparation and self-examination. No one is adequate to do justice to "the mighty acts of the Lord and to fully declare his praise" (Ps 106:2). But beatitude-based belief delights in God's justice and always seeks his righteousness. Miserable sinners we most certainly are (1 John 1:9-10), but the passion for praise means nothing if it is not joined with a passion for justice and righteousness (Micah 6:8).

"Remember me" is voiced without a hint of self-centeredness. Kidner writes, "This little prayer beautifully relates the one to the many, refusing to lose the individual in the crowd, yet retreating into no private corner of enjoyment."<sup>132</sup> Implied in this remembrance is the inclusiveness of the "body-and-soul-in-community."<sup>133</sup> The individual's blessing is all wrapped up in the blessing of "your people," "your chosen ones," "your nation," and "your inheritance." There are no independent proprietors, only "fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (Eph 2:19-20). It is difficult to imagine the apostles praying Psalm 106 any other way. In the light of Christ is there any other way to receive the invitation to praise than through the Lord Jesus Christ?

#### *Confession of Indifference*

*We have sinned, even as our ancestors did;  
we have done wrong and acted wickedly.  
When our ancestors were in Egypt,  
they gave no thought to your miracles;  
they did not remember your many kindnesses,  
and they rebelled by the sea, the Red Sea.  
Yet you saved them for his name's sake,  
to make his mighty power known.  
He rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up;  
he led them through the depths as through a desert.  
He saved them from the hand of the foe;  
from the hand of the enemy he redeemed them.*

---

<sup>132</sup> Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, 378.

<sup>133</sup> Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 29-30.

*The waters covered their adversaries;  
not one of them survived.  
Then they believed his promises  
and sang his praise.*

Psalm 106:6-12

To say, “we have sinned,” and mean it is a most necessary confession. And to say that we have sinned “even as our ancestors did” is a most necessary acknowledgment. We are no different from other generations. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). The fallen human condition is our shared solidarity. We are dead in our transgressions and sins. All of us have gratified the cravings of our flesh and followed our own desires and thoughts (Eph 2:1-3). To hear the psalmist confess the sins of someone else and not our own is to be guilty of sin. We cannot pray Psalm 106 and forget this. If we do, we begin to think that our big problems are fear, insecurity, loneliness, frustration and anxiety, but these are only symptoms of a far deeper problem. We need to trace the roots of despair back to their source. Any illusion that a convenient marriage of sentimental piety and self-help will free our souls is sadly mistaken. The power of sin has us in its grip and no amount of money, success, weight-loss, adventure, sex, plastic surgery, or power frees us from bondage. There is no work out routine or a cool set of friends that saves the soul.<sup>134</sup>

These seven case studies in evil, beginning with the apathy of the Israelites in Egypt over God’s miraculous plagues, do not require exhaustive exegetical analysis as much as corresponding reflection on how these sins are manifest today. We do not need to look far in the New Testament for examples of sinful indifference to God’s saving acts. The preacher in Hebrews exhorted believers, “We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away,” adding, “how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?” (Heb 2:2-3). Calvin acknowledged that “we will easily find that we have equal need” to confess our sins, even as we all find it easier to excuse our sins rather than confess our sins.<sup>135</sup>

In most of these confessions the Lord responds in a unique way to judge and to save, but in this first one there is only redemption. The psalmist marvels that the Lord saved the Israelites from their Egyptian enemies in spite of their indifference. He saved them “for his name’s sake.” It was only after the fact that they came to believe in the promises and sing his praise.

#### *Confession of Craving*

*But they soon forgot what he had done  
and did not wait for his plan to unfold.  
In the desert they gave in to their craving;  
in the wilderness they put God to the test.  
So he gave them what they asked for,  
but sent a wasting disease among them.*

Psalm 106:13-15

---

<sup>134</sup> Webster, *The Christ Letter*, 29.

<sup>135</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, 211.

The epicenter of redemption prior to the cross of Jesus was the Exodus. Ten plagues led up to the event, along with the Passover meal, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the annihilation of the Egyptian army. There is a lot there to forget! How could so much good news be so quickly forgotten. Added to their forgetfulness, was their refusal to wait for God's unfolding plan, their craving for their Egyptian diet, and their insistence on putting God to the test.

Jesus in the wilderness stands in sharp contrast to the Exodus Israelites in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13). His disciplined commitment to the Father's will despite physical and spiritual hardships plus his refusal to put the Lord to the test even though he was under extreme testing demonstrated the power of faithfulness. Jesus embodied in himself what Israel was meant to do: "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only" (Luke 4:8; Deut 6:13).

The Lord's measured reaction to their discontent was to give them what they asked for. As with a wilful child the Lord used their own sinful attitudes and actions against them to prove the value of trusting in him. You want food, here's food! (Num 11:18-20) and "they gorged themselves so greedily that in the process many of them became ill and died."<sup>136</sup> When we read in Romans of God giving people up to their sinful desires (Rom 1:24,26,28), it is not difficult to identify with the psalmist's statement, "So, he gave them what they asked for" (Ps 106:15).

#### *Confession of Envy*

*In the camp they grew envious of Moses  
and of Aaron, who was consecrated to the Lord.  
The earth opened up and swallowed Dathan;  
it buried the company of Abiram.  
Fire blazed among their followers;  
A flame consumed the wicked.*

Psalm 106:16-18

Envy and jealousy are added to the litany of evil coming between the Lord and his people. Instead of acknowledging the authority of God vested in Moses and Aaron, a small group of men "rose up against Moses" (Num 16:2) and convinced two hundred and fifty leading Israelites to oppose Moses and Aaron and accuse them of pride and arrogance ("Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?" Num 16:3).

Did Psalm 106 inspire Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7? There appears to be definite parallels between Israel's sins outlined in Psalm 106 and the pattern of stiff-necked, hard-hearted rebellion exposed by Stephen. He twice refers to the people's rejection of Moses. "This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, 'Who made you ruler and judge?'" and again, "But our ancestors refused to obey him, Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt" (Acts 7:37,39). The pattern of rebellious behavior cited by the psalmist and Stephen continues to plague the people of God. Only in the case of Moses and Aaron the Lord intervened and saw fit to open up the earth and swallow the likes of Dathan and Abiram. But in the case of Jesus, the stiff-necked people, who were just like their ancestors, always

---

<sup>136</sup> Ross, *Psalms*, vol. 3:288.

resisting the Holy Spirit, betrayed and murdered the Righteous One (Acts 7:51-52).

*Confession of Idolatry*

*At Horeb they made a calf  
and worshiped an idol cast from metal.  
They exchanged their glorious God  
for an image of a bull, which eats grass.  
They forgot the God who saved them,  
who had done great things in Egypt,  
miracles in the land of Ham  
and awesome deeds by the Red Sea.  
So he said he would destroy them –  
had not Moses, his chosen one,  
stood in the breach before him  
to keep his wrath from destroying them.*

Psalm 106:19-23

The further we go into the confessions the more dire the situation becomes until the Lord's patience seems at a breaking point. The idolatry of the golden calf and Aaron's "festival to the Lord" represents a new low for the people of God (Exod 32-34). Undoubtedly, Aaron reasoned that a bull suggested Yahweh's "strength and liveliness."<sup>137</sup> But the psalmist sees an image of an ox that eats grass. "Although the idolaters feign to serve God with great zeal," wrote Calvin, yet when, at the same time, they represent to themselves a God visible, they abandon the true God, and impiously make for themselves an idol."<sup>138</sup> To bow before an image "involves abandoning Yahweh for another deity."<sup>139</sup>

Moses, the Lord's chosen one, performed a startling redemptive act. He stood "in the breach" before God, "to keep his wrath from destroying them." It is not difficult to see that this act points forward to God's own Son. How can Christians pray this psalm without seeing this? Moses pled with God: "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin – but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written" (Exod 32:31-32). Jesus, the one greater than Moses, "was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many" (Heb 9:28). "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). Psalm 106 gave the apostle Paul the words he used in Romans 1 to describe human depravity. The line, "Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles" (Rom 1:22-23), comes right out of Psalm 106:20).

---

<sup>137</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 3:230.

<sup>138</sup> Calvin, *Psalms*, 222-223. Calvin distinguishes here the metal calf from the ark of the covenant: "Should any one be disposed to say that the ark of the covenant was representation of God, my answer is, That that symbol was given to the children of Israel, not to engross the whole of their attention, but only for the purpose of assisting and directing them in the spiritual worship of God."

<sup>139</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 3:230.

### *Confession of Disobedience*

*Then they despised the pleasant land;  
they did not believe his promise.  
They grumbled in their tents  
and did not obey the Lord.  
So he swore to them with uplifted hand  
that he would make them fall in the wilderness,  
make their descendants fall among the nations  
and scatter them throughout the lands.*  
Psalm 106:24-27

The confession continues with the refusal to enter the promised land. This rebellion involved a cluster of related sins. The majority despised the gift of God, rejected his promise, grumbled against the Lord and disobeyed him (Num 13:26-14:45). Their refusal to go into the promised land summed up their chronic contempt for God. “Kadesh became the symbol of Israel’s disobedience, the place where God’s past redemption was forgotten and where divine promise no longer impelled the people to obedience.”<sup>140</sup> There was a persistent pattern of stubborn rebellion and hard-hearted resistance to the will of God. Their constant waywardness is captured in the Lord’s verdict: “Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways” (Heb 3:10; Ps 95:10).<sup>141</sup>

We are more like the Israelites in the wilderness than we care to admit. We are guilty of turning “away from the living God” in self-justifying ways that impress us as preeminently reasonable. Like the majority report of the twelve spies we are ready to capitulate to the perceived strength of the prevailing culture. The culture before us is stronger than we are and we lack the faith and resolve to boldly proclaim and live the gospel. We have chimed in with the “bad report” and concluded, “We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them” (Num 13:33).<sup>142</sup>

### *Confession of Apostasy*

*They yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor  
and ate sacrifices offered to lifeless gods;  
they aroused the Lord’s anger by their wicked deeds,  
and a plague broke out among them.  
But Phinehas stood up and intervened,  
and the plague was checked.  
This was credited to him as righteousness  
for endless generations to come.*  
Psalm 106:28-31

---

<sup>140</sup> Lane, *Hebrews*, 1:85.

<sup>141</sup> See Psalm 95. The author of Hebrews saw a close parallel between the wilderness generation and the recipients of his letter.

<sup>142</sup> Webster, *Preaching Hebrews*, 78.

With the speed of a fast paced movie-trailer the psalmist races through Israel's wilderness history highlighting in graphic detail the people's faithlessness. Instead of being yoked to Yahweh many were seduced to worship Baal of Peor (Num 25:3). They openly engaged in sexual immorality with Moabite women, participated in the sacrificial meals to Baal, and bowed before their inert dead gods. The anger of the Lord is not a temperamental outburst but a meted out measured punishment designed to stop the apostasy in its tracks. Phinehas receives special commendation by the Lord because "he was as zealous for my honor among them as I am" (Num 25:11).

#### *Confession of Rebellion*

*By the waters of Meribah they angered the Lord,  
and trouble came to Moses because of them;  
for they rebelled against the Spirit of God,  
and rash words came from Moses' lips.*

Psalm 106:32-33

The psalmist's closing illustration of the Israelites in the wilderness goes back to the incident at Meribah so as to explain why Moses was unable to enter the promised land (Num 20). Up until now Moses had always acted as Yahweh's representative, a mediator on behalf of God and the people. But at Meribah, Moses took the people's rebellion personally as an act of defiance not only against Yahweh, but against himself. When he struck the rock in anger, instead of speaking to the rock as the Lord had commanded, and said, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" he put himself on the same level as the Lord. In that instance he was no longer representing the Lord, but himself.

#### *Confession of Pagan Assimilation*

*They did not destroy the peoples  
as the Lord commanded them,  
but they mingled with the nations  
and adopted their customs.  
They worshiped their idols,  
which became a snare to them.  
They sacrificed their sons  
and their daughters to false gods.  
They shed innocent blood,  
the blood of their sons and daughters,  
whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan,  
and the land was desecrated by their blood.  
They defiled themselves by what they did;  
by their deeds they prostituted themselves.*

Psalm 106:34-39

Israel was meant to be a light to the nations (Isa 45:6). They were to be the Lord's treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation, all for the sake of the salvation of the nations (Exod 19:5). The Lord mandated Israel to be an instrument of judgment, because of the evil

perversity and violent intensity of the Canaanite inhabitants. But instead of living into their identity as the people of God they became just like all the other pagan nations. Israel's integrity and survival as the people of God depended upon obeying God's specific command to destroy the nations occupying the promised land. Israel and the church were *set apart* and *set above* for the holy purpose of revealing the one and only God to all the nations, but their respective strategies are polar opposites. The church is commanded to “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” (Matthew 28:19-20). Joshua’s conquest strategy was necessary in his day and Jesus’ great commission strategy is necessary in our day. The power of the cross, which refuses to rely on violence and coercion, replaces political and military aggression. Under no circumstances were the Israelites to accommodate themselves to the surrounding cultures. These idolatrous and degenerate cultures were judged by God to be a serious threat to the identity of the people of God. The message of Moses left little doubt as to how Israel was operate in the culture (Deut 7:2-6).

The eighth confession is focused on the danger of paganization. This sin involves seven charges: disobedience to the Lord’s command, rapid cultural accommodation and assimilation through intermarriage, blatant idolatry, pagan religious syncretism, child sacrifices, violence against innocent people, and sexual immorality. The litany of evil ends with a depressing array of personal and social evils. These acts are absolutely antithetical to the will of God yet completely consistent with human depravity.

The danger of pagan assimilation remains but the strategy of cultural impact has changed. The apostle Peter understood this dynamic, believing that a positive Christian identity would prove not only resilient, but persuasive in the face of evil. He exhorted believers, “Live such good lives among pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Pet 2:12). Peter’s Christ *for* culture strategy includes what Christ opposes in our sinful, broken and fallen human culture, not for the sake of opposition, but for the sake of redemption and reconciliation

#### *The Lord’s Judgment and Mercy*

*Therefore the Lord was angry with his people  
and abhorred his inheritance.  
He gave them into the hands of the nations,  
and their foes ruled over them.  
Their enemies oppressed them  
and subjected them to their power.  
Many times he delivered them,  
but they were bent on rebellion  
and they wasted away in their sin.  
Yet he took note of their distress  
when he heard their cry;  
for their sake he remembered his covenant  
and out of his great love he relented.*

*He caused all who held them captive  
to show them mercy.*

Psalm 106:40-46

The psalmist sums up the dark side of salvation history with an all-encompassing description that ranges from the period of the Judges to the Babylonian exile. In spite of chronic rebellion and persistent sin the good news of God's great love prevails. The Lord remembers his covenant and acts to save his people. The psalmist's sober confession remains true today, "We have sinned, even as our ancestors did; we have done wrong and acted wickedly" (Ps 106:6). Faithful believers do not stand over ancient Israel in judgment; we stand with them in solidarity. At every turn the Lord's grace prevails and persists in spite of great sin, both their sin and ours. The extension of God's grace to the Israelites made God's grace in Christ possible. This is why when Augustine came to the end of Psalm 106 he exclaimed, "Come then, whoever reads this, and recognize the grace of God, by which we are redeemed unto eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ . . ." <sup>143</sup>

The apostles frequently turned to the dark side of Israel's rebellious history as a warning against the sins of the early church from apathy to apostasy. They drew a direct line from Israel to the Church and made a case for learning from Israel's mistakes. "Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did" (1 Cor 10:6). The author of Hebrews wrote, "Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience" (Heb 4:11). Psalm 106 is a good reminder to the followers of Christ to check any idealistic and triumphalist notions of the church. We ought to pray like the psalmist, "Remember me, Lord, when you show favor to your people, come to my aid when you save them. . ." (Ps 106:4).

*"Save Us!"*

*Save us, Lord our God,  
and gather us from the nations,  
that we may give thanks to your holy name  
and glory in your praise.*

*Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,  
from everlasting to everlasting.  
Let all the people say, "Amen!"*

*Praise the Lord.*

Psalm 106:47-48

The first believers who prayed this psalm envisioned the Lord gathering the exiled children of Abraham back to the promised land. Believers today envision the global church, made possible by the mercy of God, gathering disciples from "every nation, tribe, people and language" (Rev 7:9). Meanwhile, we await the coming King in a posture of humility and in an attitude of praise.

---

<sup>143</sup> Augustine, *Psalms*, 531.

Psalm 106 prompts us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in us to will and to act according to his good pleasure (Phil 2:12-13). Book IV ends with an enthusiastic declaration of praise. The tragedy of human depravity will not prevail, but the triumph of the Lord's steadfast love and faithfulness will. Praise the Lord. Hallelujah!

### Bibliography of Works Sited (Book I-IV).

Allen, Leslie C. *Psalms 101-150: Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 21. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015

Allen, Roland. *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's Or Ours?* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962.

Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Poetry*. New York: Basic Books, 1986.

Anderson, A. A. *Psalms (1-72) and Psalms (73-150): The New Century Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972.

Anderson, Francis, I. *Job: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008.

Anderson, Leith. *Dying For Change*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House, 1990.

Anderson, Ray Sherman. *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982.

Athanasius. "The Letter of St. Athanasius to Marcellinus on the Interpretation of the Psalms," in *On the Incarnation*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977, 97-119.

Augustine. *Saint Augustine: Confessions*. Trans. Henry Chadwick. Oxford University Press. 1992.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Expositions on the Book of Psalms." *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 8. Translated by A. Cleveland Coxe. Edited by Philip Schaff. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Exposition of the Psalms: 1-32*, trans. Maria Boulding; ed. John E. Rotelle *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. New York: New City, 2000.

Barclay, William. *Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer for Everyman*. New York: Harper Collins, 1975.

Barrett, Lisa Feldman. "When Is Speech Violence?" *New York Times* (July 15, 2017)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/14/opinion/sunday/when-is-speech-violence.html?smid=nytcore-iphone-share&smprod=nytcore-iphone>

Barth, Karl. *Dogmatics in Outline*. New York, Harper & Row, 1959.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Christian Life: Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4/4: Lecture Fragments, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981.

Barth, Markus. *Ephesians: The Anchor Bible*, vol. 34. New York: Doubleday, 1974.

- Bauckham, Richard. *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation*. London: T. & T. Clark, 1993.
- Beale, G. K. *The Book of Revelation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999.
- Beale, G. K. and D. A. Carson, editors. *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007.
- Becker, Ernest. *The Denial of Death*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973.
- Belcher, Richard P. "The Messiah and the Psalms" *Preaching Christ from all the Psalms*. Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2006.
- Blaiklock, E. M. "Caesarea Philippi," Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible. Editor: Merrill Tenney. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975. vol. 1:682-683.
- Blamires, Harry. *The Christian Mind*. London: SPCK, 1978.
- Boice, James Montgomery. *Psalms* (Vol 1-3). Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1954.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . *Meditating on the Word*. New York: Ballantine, 1986.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1970.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . *The Cost of Discipleship*. New York: Macmillan, 1963.
- Bray, Gerald. *God is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.
- Brown, Jr., H. Jackson. *Life's Little Instruction Book*. Nashville, Tennessee: Rutledge Hill Press, 1991.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990.
- Brueggemann, Walter and Bellinger, Jr. William H. *Psalms: New Cambridge Bible Commentary*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Brueggeman, Walter. *The Message of the Psalms*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . "The Psalms as Prayer," *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*. Editor: Patrick Miller. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995, 33-66.
- Bruner, Frederick Dale. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . *Matthew: A Commentary*. 2 vol. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004.
- Bryson, Bill. *A Short History of Nearly Everything*. New York: Broadway, 2004.
- Buechner, Frederick. *Telling Secrets*. New York: HarperCollins, 1991.
- Burch, George Bosworth. *Alternative Goals in Religion*. Montreal, Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1973.

- Calvin, John. *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (vol. 4:1-35; vol. 5:36-66; vol. 6:67-92; vol. 7:93-119; vol. 8:119-150), Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981.
- Carson, D. A. *The Gospel According to John*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.
- Chambers, Oswald. *So Send I You*. London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1939, 1964.
- Chesterton, G. K. *Orthodoxy*. New York: Image, 1959.
- Chrysostom, John. "Homilies on the Gospel of John: LXXXI and LXXXII." In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 14, first series, edited by Philip Schaff, 299-306. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . *Six Books on the Priesthood*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003.
- Clapp, Rodney L. "Shame Crucified," *Christianity Today*, March 11, 1991, 26-28.
- Clarkson, Margaret. "Lord of the Universe, Hope of the Word," Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing Co, 1987.
- Clifford, Richard J. *Psalms 73-150*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003.
- Colquhoun, Frank. *Hymns That Live*. Hadette, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1980.
- Craigie, Peter. *Psalms 1-50*. Word Biblical Commentary. Waco, TX: Word, 1983.
- Crick, Francis. *The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994.
- Cundall, A. E. "Baal," *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975 vol.1:431-433
- Cushman, Robert. *The Cry of the Stone*. Editor: Michael R. Paulick. Transcription by James W. Baker. The General Society of Mayflower Descendants, 2016.
- Davidson, Robert. *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.
- Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.
- DeCaissé-Walford, Nancy; Jacobson, Rolf A; Tanner, Beth Laneel. *The Book of Psalms: The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014.
- Delitzsch, Franz. *The Psalms*, vol. 1-3. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971.
- Denham, Michael. *Reverberating Word: Powerful Worship*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018.
- Dillard, Annie. *Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters*. New York: Harper & Row, 1982.
- Dinwiddie, Richard D. "The God Who Sings," *Christianity Today*, (July 15, 1983), 21-24.

- Dreher, Rod. *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*. Random House, 2017.
- Dreyfus, Hubert, and Sean Dorrance Kelly. *All Things Shining: Reading the Western Classics to Find Meaning in a Secular Age*. New York: Free Press, 2011.
- Dryness, William. "Aesthetics in the Old Testament: Beauty in Context." *JETS* 28, no. 4 (December 1985): 421-432.
- Eaton, John. *The Psalms*. New York: Continuum, 2005.
- Elliot, Elizabeth. *Shadow of the Almighty: The Life and Testament of Jim Elliot*. New York: Harper & Row, 1958.
- Elliott, John H. *1 Peter: The Anchor Yale Bible*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000.
- Ellul, Jacques. *The Political Illusion*. New York: Vintage, 1972.
- Feinberg, C. L. "Asaph," *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975, 345.
- Feinberg, John, S. *Deceived By God? A Journey Through Suffering*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997.
- France, R. T. *The Gospel of Matthew: The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007.
- Futato, Mark D. *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2007.
- Galli, Mark. "The Prodigal Sports Fan," *Christianity Today* (April 8, 2005) 49-50.
- Gardiner, John Eliot. *Bach: Music in the Castle of Heaven*. New York: Knopf, 2014.
- George, Timothy. *Theology of the Reformers*, rev. ed. Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman, 2013.
- Gillquist, Peter. "A Marathon We Are Meant to Win," *Christianity Today*, October, 1981, 22-23.
- Goetz, David. *Death by Suburb*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2006.
- Goldingay, John. *Psalms* (Vol 1-3). Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006-2008.
- Grant, Jamie A. *The King as Exemplar: The Function of Deuteronomy's Kingship Law in the Shaping of the Book of Psalms*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004.
- Grant, Robert. "O Worship the King," *The Celebration Hymnal*. Dallas, TX: Word / Integrity, 1997.
- Griedanus, Sidney. *Preaching Christ from the Psalms: Foundations for Expository Sermons in the*

- Christian Year*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016.
- Groothuis, Doug. "The Church in Danger," *Moody Magazine* (February. 2003), 36-37.
- Guelich, Robert A. *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding*. Waco, TX: Word, 1982.
- Guthrie, George H. "Hebrews." In *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, edited by G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, 919-95. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007.
- Harink, Douglas. *1 & 2 Peter*. Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009.
- Harrington, MD, Samuel. *At Peace: Choosing a Good Death After a Long life*. New York: Grand Central Life and Style, 2018.
- Hays, Richard B. *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *First Corinthians: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville, Kentucky: WJK, 1997.
- Heine, Ronald, E. *Gregory of Nyssa's Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms*. Clarendon, Oxford, 1995.
- Henry, Carl F. H. *God, Revelation, and Authority*. Dallas: Word, 1976. vol. 1.
- Henry, Matthew. *Psalms*. Lexington, KY: no publisher sited, 2016.
- Herbert, George. *The Country Parson, The Temple*. Editor: John Wall. New York: Paulist Press, 1981.
- Hess, Richard S. *The Old Testament: A Historical, Theological, and Critical Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016.
- Hestenes, Roberta. "Personal Renewal: Reflections on 'Brokenness'" *TSF Bulletin*, Nov-Dec 1984, 23-24.
- Hicks, Zac. *The Worship Pastor*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016.
- Holloway, Richard. "Dust and Glory," posted August 23, 2011.  
<https://studiesinhope.com/2011/08/dust-and-glory/>
- Holmes, Catherine. *Annotations to William Faulkner's Hamlet*, Oxford: Taylor & Francis, 1996.
- Horton, Michael S. "How the Kingdom Comes," *Christianity Today* 50/1 (January 2006), 46.
- Hunter, George. *Radical Outreach: The Recovery of Apostolic Ministry and Evangelism*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003.
- Hunter, James Davison. *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the*

- Late Modern World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Jobes, Karen H. *1 Peter*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005.
- Kapolyo, Joe. "Matthew" (1105-1170), in *Africa Bible Commentary*, Adeyemo, Tokunboh, Editor. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006.
- Keller, Phillip. *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974.
- Keller, Timothy. *The Songs of Jesus*. New York: Viking, 2015.
- Kidner, Derek. *Psalms 1-72*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. *Attack Upon 'Christendom,'* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . "Either/Or: A Fragment of Life," in *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, editor Robert Bretall. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1946.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . *Provocations: Spiritual Writings of Kierkegaard*. Edited by Charles E. Moore. Farmington, PA: The Plough Publishing House, 1999.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . *Purity of Heart Is To Will One Thing*. New York: Harper & Row, 1956.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . *The Sickness Unto Death*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974.
- Kreeft, Peter. *Three Philosophies of Life: Ecclesiastes, Job, Song of Songs*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2016.
- Kuhn, H. B. "Names of God," *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Editor: Merrill Tenney. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975, vol. 2:760-766.
- Labberton, Mark. *Called: The Crisis and Promise of Following Jesus Today*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014.
- Lane, William L. *Hebrews: Word Biblical Commentary*, vols. 1-2. Dallas: Word, 1991.
- Leupold, Herbert C. *Exposition of The Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969, 1989 (originally published 1959, The Wartburg Press).
- Lewis, C. S. *A Grief Observed*. New York: Bantam Books, 1961  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . *Mere Christianity*. New York: Collier, 1960.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . *Miracles*. London: Fontana, 1972.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . *Reflections on the Psalms*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1958.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . *Surprised by Joy*. London: Fontana, 1972.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . *The Four Loves*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1960.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . *The Problem of Pain*. New York: Macmillan, 1962.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . *The Weight of Glory*. New York: Collier, 1965.
- Lincoln, Andrew T. *Ephesians: Word Biblical Commentary*. Dallas: Word, 1990.
- Longman, Tremper. *How To Read The Psalms*, Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1988.

- Luther, Martin. *First Lectures on the Psalms: Psalms 1-75*. Luther's Works, vol. 10. Saint Louis: Concordia, 1974.
- Lyte, Henry F. "Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven." *The Celebration Hymnal*. Dallas, TX: Word/Integrity, 1997.
- Mangina, Joseph L. *Revelation: The Brazos Theological Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2010.
- Martins, Elmer. *God's Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. North Richland Hills, TX: BIPAL Press, 1998.
- McEwan, Ian. *Saturday*. New York: Knopf, 2006.
- McKnight, Scot. *Kingdom Conspiracy*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016.
- Mounce, Robert. *Revelation: New International Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994.
- Mouw, Richard. "The Life of Bondage in the Light of Grace," *Christianity Today* (December 9, 1988), 41-44.
- Muir, John. *The Mountains of California*, chp. 10, 1984.  
[https://vault.sierraclub.org/john\\_muir\\_exhibit/writings/the\\_mountains\\_of\\_california/chapter\\_10.aspx](https://vault.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/writings/the_mountains_of_california/chapter_10.aspx)
- Neander, Joachim. "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty," *Psalter Hymnal*. Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Publications, 1987.
- Nehrbass, Daniel Michael. *Praying Curses: The Therapeutic and Preaching Value of the Imprecatory Psalms*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013.
- Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Light Has Come: An Exposition of the Fourth Gospel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989.
- Nicholi, Jr., Armand M. *The Question of God: C. S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex, and the Meaning of Life*. New York: Free Press, 2002.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, "The Gay Science," section 125, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Translated and Edited by Walter Kaufmann. New York: The Modern Library, 2000.
- Norris, Kathleen. "Why the Psalms Scare Us," *Christianity Today* (July 15, 1996), 21-23.
- O'Brien, Peter T. *The Letter to the Hebrews*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010.
- Okorochoa, Cyril and Francis Foulkes. "Psalms" (605-746) in *Africa Bible Commentary*, Adeyemo, Tokunboh, Editor. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006.
- Old, Hughes Oliphant Old. *The Reaching and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian*

- Church: Moderatism, Pietism, and Awakening*. vol.5. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004.
- Packer, J. I. *Keep In Step With The Spirit*. Old Tappan, New Jersey: Revell, 1984.
- Palmer, Parker, J. *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1998.
- Payne, Philip B. "Jesus' Implicit Claim to Deity in His Parables," *Trinity Journal* 2 (Spring 1981): 3-23.
- Peterson, Eugene H. *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1980.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Answering God: The Psalms As Tools For Prayer*. New York: Harper & Row, 1989.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *As Kingfishers Catch Fire: A conversation on the ways of God formed by the words of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: a conversation in spiritual theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Earth & Altar: The Community of Prayer in a Self-Bound Society*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1985.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Growth: An Act of the Will," *Leadership* (Fall 1988), 40-42.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Leap Over A Wall: Earthy Spirituality for Everyday Christians*. San Francisco: Harper, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Message Remix*. Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Pastor: A Memoir*. New York: Harper One, 2011.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987.
- Pollan, Michael. *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*. New York: Penguin Books, 2009.
- Reardon, Patrick Henry. *Christ in the Psalms*. Chesterton, IN: Ancient Faith, 2011.
- Redman, Matt. "The Otherness of God," *Christianity Today* (September 7, 2004).
- Robertson, O. Palmer. *The Flow of the Psalms: Discovering Their Structure and Theology*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R. 2015.
- Ross, Allen P. "Living and Worshiping with the Psalms," Beeson Chapel Sermon, September 7, 2006.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Psalms* (Vol 1: Psalms 1-41; Vol 2: Psalms 42-89; Vol 3: Psalms 90-150). Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011.
- Rutledge, Fleming. *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015.
- Seifred, Mark. "Romans." *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Editors: D. A. Carson and G. K. Beale. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007.
- Sire, James W. *Praying the Psalms of Jesus*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007.

- Sittser, Gerald L. *A Grace Disguised*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.
- Smith, James K. A. *Desiring the Kingdom*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 218.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013.
- Smith, Jr, Robert. *The Oasis of God: From Mourning to Morning – Biblical Insights from Psalm 42 & 43*. Mountain Home, AR: BorderStone Press, 2014.
- Spurgeon, Charles. *H. C. H. Christ's Words from the Cross*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . *Spurgeon's Sermons on the Psalms*. Charles Cook, Editor. London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1960.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . The Spurgeon Archive: *The Treasury of David*. <https://archive.spurgeon.org/treasury/>
- Steyn, Mark. *America Alone: The End of the World as We Know It*. Washington, DC: Regnery, 2006.
- Stott, John R. W. *Christian Counter-Culture: The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1978.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . *Christian Mission in the Modern World*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1975.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . *Favorite Psalms*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1988.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1979.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ . "Meditation on Psalm 8," *Wheaton Alumni Magazine*, Nov. 1975:5-6.
- Strawn, Brent, and Van Harn, Roger. *Psalms for Preaching and Worship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009.
- Sullivan, Andrew. "Andrew Sullivan on the Opioid Epidemic in Anmerica," *New York Magazine* (February, 2018). <https://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2018/02/americas-opioid-epidemic.html>
- Tada, Joni Eareckson. *Anger: Aim It in the Right Direction*. Torrance, CA: Rose Publishing, 2012.
- Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Taylor, LaTonya. "The Church of O," *Christianity Today* (April 1, 2002), 43-45
- Temple, William. *Readings in St. John's Gospel*. London: Macmillan, 1959.
- Ten Boom, Corrie. *Clippings from My Notebook*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1982.
- Thielicke, Helmut. *Life Can Begin Again: Sermons on the Sermon on the Mount*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003.
- Turner, Steve. *Amazing Grace: The Story of America's Most Beloved Song*. New York: HarperCollins, 2002.
- Urs von Balthasar, Hans. *Unless You Become Like This Child*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1991.
- Van Harn, Roger E. and Strawn, Brent A, Editors. *Psalms for Preaching and Worship: A Lectionary*

- Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.
- Volf, Miroslav. *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.
- Waltke, Bruce K. *An Old Testament Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007.
- Waters, Larry J. and Roy B. Zuck, editors. *Why O God?: Suffering and Disability in the Bible and Church*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011.
- Webster, Brian L. and Beach, David R. *The Essential Bible Companion to the Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.
- Webster, Douglas D. *A Passion for Christ: An Evangelical Christology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Finding Spiritual Direction*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Follow the Lamb: A Pastoral Approach to The Revelation*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Living in Tension: A Theology of Ministry*, vol. 1-2. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Oppression," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Ed. Walter A. Elwell. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984, 799-801.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Outposts of Hope: First Peter's Christ for Culture Strategy*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Preaching Hebrews: The End of Religion and Faithfulness to the End*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Second Thoughts for Skeptics*. Vancouver, British Columbia: Regent College, 2010.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Soulcraft: How God Shapes Us Through Relationships*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Soundtrack of the Soul: The Beatitudes of Jesus*. Toronto: Clements, 2009.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Text Messaging: A Conversation on Preaching*. Toronto: Clements, 2010.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Christ Letter: a Christological Approach to Preaching and Practicing Ephesians*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Easy Yoke*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The God Who Comforts*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The God Who Kneels*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The God Who Prays*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Living Word: 10 Life-Changing Ways to Experience the Bible*. Chicago, IL: Moody, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Intensity without Ultimacy: A Christian Perspective on Sports," *The Other Journal*, March 21, 2016.  
<https://theotherjournal.com/2016/03/21/intensity-without-ultimacy-christian-perspective-sports/>
- Webster, Jeremiah, D. *A Rumor of Soul: The Poetry of W. B. Yeats*. Milwaukee, WI: Wiseblood Books, 2015.
- Weil, Simone. *Gravity and Grace*. New York: Routledge Classics, vol. 41, 2002.
- Wells, David F. *No Place for Truth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993.

- Wesley, John. "Serious Thoughts Occasioned by the Late Earthquake at Lisbon." *The Works of John Wesley*. New York: J Emory & Waugh, 1818. vol. 11:1-13.
- Weinberg, Steven. *The First Three Minutes: A Modern View of the Origin of the Universe*. New York: Basic Books, 1977.
- White, R. E. O. *A Christian Handbook to the Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Salvation." In *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Walter Elwell, 967-69. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984.
- Wilberforce, William. *Real Christianity*. Edited by James M. Houston. Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 1997
- Wilcock, Micahel. *The Message of Psalms: Vol 1: Psalms 1-72; Vol 2: Psalms 73-150*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001.
- Wilson, Gerald H. *Psalms, vol 1: The NIV Application Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.
- Wiman, Christian. *My Bright Abyss: Meditations of a Modern Believer*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013.
- Witvliet, John. *The Biblical Psalms in Christian Worship: A Brief Introduction and Guide to Resources*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.
- Wolf, Katherine and Jay. *Hope Heals: A True Story of Overwhelming Loss and an Overcoming Love*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016.
- Wright, Christopher J. H. *An Eye for An Eye: The Place of Old Testament Ethics Today*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1983.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006.
- Yancey, Philip. *The Bible Jesus Read*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999.
- Yankelovich, Daniel. *New Rules: Searching for Self-Fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down*. New York: Bantam, 1981.