Sunday, January 8, 2017

Lesson: Psalms 96:1-6, 10-13; Time of Action: Unknown; Place of Action: Palestine

Golden Text: “O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth” (Psalms 96:1).

I. INTRODUCTION. There’s a story often told about an older married couple. The husband was a man of few words. Once his wife asked him whether he still loved her after so many years, he replied “I said I loved you when I married you, and if anything changes, I’ll let you know.” Undoubtedly, it wasn’t his practice to tell his wife he loved her. He thought once was enough! You don’t have to be a marriage counselor to know that it’s very important that couples declare their love for each other frequently. The same thing is true with praising God. His mercies are new every morning calling for a new praise every morning. This week’s lesson declares that all creation praises God. As part of the creation, Christians should always praise Him for who He is and what He has done. We are never wrong to praise the Lord for what He has done for us, continues to do, and promises to do in future blessings. We honor Him for His
beautiful and perfect character. No god that man can conceive has the character that deserves praise.

II. LESSON BACKGROUND. Psalms 96 is one of a series of psalms (Psalms 95-100) that have a common theme: they all begin with a call to sing praises to the Lord. The reason for this call is that He rules not only Israel, but all creation as well. Since both the time and the author of this psalm are unknown, there is some question about when it was written and by whom. It’s very similar to the psalm found in I Chronicles 16:23-33, which was used as part of the praises accompanying the moving of the Ark of the Covenant by King David into the tabernacle constructed in Jerusalem. If Psalms 96 was taken from I Chronicles 16, then David would be its author. The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) indicates in one of its headings that David was the author. However, it has also been suggested by some that this psalm was composed after the Babylonian Exile for use in the service of the second temple. Many Bible scholars are inclined to agree that it came from a period later than David’s time. It’s more likely that Psalms 96 was a part of David’s original composition and then used later in the temple after the return from Captivity. However, much of this is only speculation so we can’t be certain about any of it.
III. TELL OF GOD’S GLORY (Psalms 96:1-3)

A. Sing to the Lord (Psalms 96:1-2).

1. (vs. 1). Our first verse says “O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth.” The psalmist issued an invitation to praise God in worship with this command. This call to “sing unto the Lord a new song” was initially for Israel as seen in the psalmist’s use of God’s personal name “Lord” or Yahweh, which the Israelites knew very well. The first method of praise emphasized by the psalmist is singing. Then he repeated this command saying “sing unto the Lord, all the earth.” The praises of Israel alone are not adequate enough to fully honor the Lord as He deserves. “All the earth” may include the creation itself, but it certainly includes all mankind. The Lord deserves universal praise, but His people should lead the way. This psalm has a prophetic emphasis. It looks forward to the time when Yahweh will return to rule all nations of the earth (see Psalms 96:3). Therefore, the phrase “a new song” refers to one that would appropriately praise God for the coming glorious millennial age. Since the Messiah’s reign will free the earth (see Isaiah 11:1-9) from its long night of sorrow (see Romans 8:22-23), the Lord deserves unrestrained song and rejoicing. Note: The term “new song” is used nine times in Scripture (see Psalms 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isaiah 42:10; Revelation 5:9; 14:3). The Spirit of God can make an old song new to us as we grow in our knowledge of God and His
Word, or as we have new experiences. God can also open our hearts to a song completely new to us. Our growth in our appreciation of “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (see Ephesians 5:19) is one indication of our development in the Christian life. The point is that our worship should always be fresh and exciting, not simply thoughtless and boring. What is of greatest importance is that the worship must be scriptural (see Colossians 3:16-17). A choir has no more right to sing a lie than a preacher has to preach a lie, and not all “religious songs” are doctrinally correct. When God works, He obeys His own Word; so any worship that is contrary to God’s Word will not please Him.

2. (vs. 2). In this verse the psalmist continues to exhort his readers saying “Sing unto the Lord, bless his name; shew forth his salvation from day to day.” As part of the praise due to God, His people are again called to “Sing unto the Lord, bless his name.” The phrase “bless his name” means “to praise” or “speak well of God.” Israel was also to “shew forth his salvation from day to day.” The words “shew forth” means “to preach” or “to bring good news.” “Salvation” here refers to deliverance in a broader concept than just the bestowal of eternal life through Jesus Christ. For Israel, it consisted of a whole series of deliverances nationally, physically, and spiritually. It included the Exodus from Egypt, the preservation in the wilderness, and the victories over enemies in Canaan. “Salvation” or deliverance also included prosperity when Israel was obedient as well as God’s gracious dealings when the people were disobedient. God’s mighty works of
deliverance call for praise and for His people to “shew forth” or bring the good news of “his salvation from day to day.” God’s “salvation” or deliverance of the Israelites was so much a part of their lives that the psalmist called on them to proclaim it “from day to day.” In other words, in their daily routine they were to speak of God’s deliverance to one another. These people who were so greatly blessed were charged with the duty of sharing the source of their blessings with others. As believers, we have the same responsibility (see Luke 24:46-48; I Peter 2:9). The ultimate good news of “salvation” is deliverance from sin through the work of Jesus Christ. This good news should be on the lips of all believers “from day to day” meaning from opportunity to opportunity to share it.

B. Declare the Lord’s glory (Psalms 96:3). In this verse God’s people are called to “Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people.” God’s “glory” speaks of His manifested character which involves such perfections as His omniscience, wisdom, omnipresence, omnipotence, love, mercy, grace, holiness, and goodness. God’s wonderful actions flow out of His glorious character. This is what we are called on to “declare” or publish “among the heathen.” The word “heathen” means nations and is usually a reference to non-Jews. The term is regularly used in the Old Testament to refer to the nations around Israel. Here, “heathen” refers to anyone who has never heard of the God of Israel. The word “people” in Hebrew is literally “peoples” and is sometimes used instead
of “heathen.” Therefore the psalmist was saying that it was Israel’s duty to publicize God’s glory to the rest of the world. In addition, they were also to speak of “his wonders among all people.” In other words, God’s marvelous works in history and in our lives needed to be declared to others so that they might come to worship Him. **Note:** Clearly the psalmist has evangelism in mind. However, it’s important to see that the call to declare God’s glory to the world comes forth out of our worship and praise. If our passion for God is weak, eagerness for evangelism and mission work will also be weak. Churches that are not focused on exalting the majesty and beauty of God will hardly have a fervent desire to “declare his glory among the nations.” Many of Israel’s prophets were commissioned at times to proclaim the Lord’s message to the surrounding peoples, but the greatest witness of God working in Israel was to be Israel’s obedience to His commands and His consequent blessing of their activities (see Deuteronomy 4:5-8). This is true of the church as well!

**IV. ACKNOWLEDGE GOD’S GREATNESS (Psalms 96:4-6)**

A. The Lord is above all (Psalms 96:4). In this verse the psalmist continues to say “For the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised: he is to be feared above all
Now the psalmist begins to focus on the greatness of God. The word “For” introduces the psalmist’s reason for declaring the glory and wonders of the Lord and it can mean “because.” The reason was “For the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised.” The use of the name “Lord” or Yahweh speaks of His self-existence and therefore His greatness. This makes the “Lord” worthy of great praise as seen in the phrase “and greatly to be praised.” Only the best and most sincere praise is worthy of our God who is above everything and everyone else. In addition, “he (the Lord) is to be feared above all gods.” In other words, His greatness calls for reverential fear. The term “fear” includes reverence and awe. When we are really in awe of God’s character and His works, it should cause us to fall before Him in worship. The mention of “gods” does not mean that the psalmist believed that other “gods” existed. He was simply contrasting the greatness of the Lord with the impotence of everything else humans had chosen to worship.

Note: Our God is far and away above everything created or that man can imagine. For that reason He should be feared and praised above anything the world exalts. Yes, God does give us people, possessions, work, and experiences that we can find joy in. However, we can’t let those things keep us from honoring the only One who is truly great!

B. The Lord is Creator of all (Psalms 96:5-6).

1. (vs. 5). The psalmist goes on to say in this verse
“For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the Lord made the heavens.” The word “nations” means “peoples” and again refers to non-Jews. With the words “For all the gods of the nations are idols,” the psalmist was saying that the many “gods” that were worshiped by people throughout the world are just worthless “idols.” The word translated “idols” actually means “worthless idols.” They were objects manufactured by humans that were passed off as “gods” (see Leviticus 19:4; 26:1) that really don’t exist (see Isaiah 45:5). Isaiah pointed out that they were nothing more than the materials they were made from (see Isaiah 44:9-19). An unthinking, superstitious man would use part of a log to warm himself and cook his food, and with the rest of the log he made a god to deliver him. This was utter nonsense (see Isaiah 19:15-17). In contrast to the worthless “gods” of the heathen, the psalmist said “but the Lord made the heavens.” The awesome scope of God’s creation confirms His greatness, because the creator of any item is greater than the item itself (see Psalms 95:3-6).

Note: It’s amazing that the Israelites sold out so disastrously to idolatry even after hearing such convincing arguments to support that Yahweh was the only one worthy to be worshiped. Unfortunately, idolatry still has a strong appeal for God’s people. We are tempted to exchange the blessings of the glory of God for the temporary desires of modern life—fame, wealth, carnal pleasure, or false philosophies. Only by saturating our minds with His Word will we be delivered from such idols.

2. (vs. 6). This verse says “Honour and majesty
are before him: strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.” The psalmist here declares that God is characterized by “honor” or splendor. “Majesty” speaks of the greatness of the Lord’s character. God is also characterized by “strength and beauty” which is revealed in everything we see as strong and beautiful in the world He created. The Lord’s “strength” is revealed in His ability to create everything that exists from nothing, and His “beauty” is seen in everything that He has created. **Note: In our sin-fractured world, beauty and strength are often forced apart. Strength takes the form of brute force, and those who glory in it also destroy beauty. They leave the physical world wasted and run roughshod over the image of God in their fellow men. However, in God, beauty and strength merge in a perfect combination.**

By saying that these characteristics of God “are before him” and “are in his sanctuary,” it appears that the psalmist was poetically speaking of “honour,” “majesty,” “strength and beauty” as if they were persons standing in God’s presence. The point is that these characteristics of God are present wherever He is, especially in Israel’s “sanctuary” or tabernacle, and later the temple where God’s glorious presence could be visibly seen (see Exodus 40:34-35; I Kings 8:10-11). Of course, for believers in the church age, we are God’s “sanctuary” (see I Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19). However, whether in the tabernacle, the temple, the church, or the future millennial Jerusalem, “honour and majesty” and “strength and beauty” are God’s companions.
V. ANTICIPATE GOD’S COMING (Psalms 96:10-13).
Verses 7-9 are not part of our lesson, but I believe they add
tremendously to the psalmist’s call to praise the Lord in
worship. In verse 7, the psalmist calls on “the kindreds of the
people” meaning all the families of the earth to “give unto
the Lord glory and strength.” The phrase “give unto the
Lord” does not mean that worshipers can actually give God
attributes that He doesn’t have. Instead, it means that
worshipers should ascribe glory and strength to Him because
we know that He already has them. This is a call to openly
confess the characteristics of God’s greatness. In verse 8,
the call is to “Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his
name.” In order to do this properly, the worshipers were told
to “bring an offering, and come into his courts.” Note:
While we are no longer required to come to God in this
prescribed way, there is a principle here that applies to
our worship. It’s that worship itself is giving to the
Lord. It’s not a matter of asking Him for blessings or
expecting to get a good feeling from the experience.
It’s a matter of coming through Jesus Christ to “offer
the sacrifice of praise to God continually” (see Hebrews
13:15). Then in verse 9, the psalmist exhorted the people of
the earth saying “O worship the Lord in the beauty of
holiness: fear before him, all the earth.” In other words, the
psalmist was calling on all the earth to “worship the Lord in
all his holy beauty and tremble before him.” When we
worship we are to guard against ritualism by reminding
ourselves of the awe God deserves. Godly fear or reverence
keeps us from taking His blessings for granted, including the
present opportunity to worship. This is where our lesson continues.

A. The Lord's rule (Psalms 96:10). This verse says “Say among the heathen that the Lord reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: he shall judge the people righteously.” The word “Say” here indicates that the psalmist is about to give a message that is to be shared “among the heathen” or the unbelieving nations. The message to the unbelieving world is that “the Lord reigneth.” This no doubt refers to the reign of Israel’s Messiah, Jesus Christ during the millennium. This phrase could also be translated as “the Lord is King.” The truth is, He is, always has been, and always will be the Sovereign or King of the universe. But here the psalmist saw a future time when the Lord would come to judge all people (see Psalms 96:13). The reign of the Lord will begin when Christ returns to earth (see Revelation 19:11-20:6). Very few, if any of the Old Testament saints saw or even understood the difference between Jesus' first and second comings. But the New Testament tells us that the Lord will rule on earth at His second advent which is still yet to come. When the Lord returns, the psalmist said that “the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved.” This seems to mean that when Jesus returns and sets up His Kingdom, there will be stability and security on earth. The standing of the world and its stability are in the hands of Christ. As Redeemer, He upholds all things, and preserves the course of nature. The world of mankind shall be
established, and preserved, until the election of grace is complete. When Christ reigns, the psalmist also said that “he shall judge the people righteously.” The word “judge” here does not refer to judgment and condemnation, but to Christ’s governing. In other words, the Lord will rule on earth with righteousness and perfect justice. There will be no injustice anywhere during His reign. **Note:** In a sense, God has always exercised righteous government over the earth. In spite of sinful man’s chaotic record of war and anarchy, God still overrules in order to accomplish His will. He is sovereign and will never allow earthly affairs to get out of control. This truth is a wonderful reassurance to the worshiper, who can live a stable, secure life of trust in the divine King. The focus of this verse is prophetic. It pictures the future day when worshipers will pour into Jerusalem from all over the earth to rejoice that the Messiah has returned and taken control, abolished war, and brought a stability that the world has never seen before (see Isaiah 2:1-4; 11:1-9; Zechariah 8:20-23).

**B. Nature’s rejoicing (Psalms 96:11-12).**

1. (vs. 11). In this verse, the psalmist continued to say “Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof.” Now the psalmist expands his call to praise and worship from all the people of earth to include parts of God’s creation. He included every aspect of creation, beginning with the
heavens, the earth, and the sea (see Isaiah 44:23; 55:12). When the Lord has returned and sets up His earthly rule, the psalmist said “Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad.” This statement calls on everything in the vast expanse of heaven and everything on dry land to “rejoice” in the Lord’s reign. Of course, these words are poetic and figurative because these objects can’t verbally praise the Lord. But although nature itself is corrupted by the curse of sin and longs to be redeemed (see Romans 8:22), in a sense it can rejoice along with us in the coming reign of Jesus Christ.

2. (vs. 12). This verse says “Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice.” The “field” in the psalmist’s mind, no doubt included all the living things that inhabit it. “All the trees of the wood” probably included the animal residents of the forest as well. The psalmist called on all of creation to “be joyful” in praise of God! Note: If it is argued that animals and inanimate life forms cannot express the emotion of joy to their Creator, we must remember that this is poetic language. It describes a situation in which every part of God’s creation would have reason to rejoice if it were capable of doing so. The nonhuman aspects of creation are asked to participate in this rejoicing because all of creation will benefit from the rule of Christ. Creation fell under a curse when sin entered the world (see Genesis 3:17-18), and it continues to suffer as human wickedness multiplies. However, creation will be liberated to produce its full potential and achieve its intended purpose when the Lord comes to reign (see Isaiah 11:6-9; 65:25; Romans
C. The Lord’s judgment (Psalms 96:13). In our final verse the psalmist said “Before the Lord: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.” The words “Before the Lord” actually should be part of the last phrase of the previous verse causing it to read: “then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord.” When the Lord “cometh” or returns, He “cometh to judge the earth.” Again this refers to the Lord’s justice and equity in ruling. Note: When we think of the Lord returning to judge the earth, we usually think of the dire prophecies of the book of Revelation. That judgment does not usually bring forth joyful emotion. We must remember that the Lord’s judgment not only includes the purging of the earth of wickedness, but also His righteous rule during the millennium that will follow (see Revelation 19:11-16; 20:1-6). He will set right all the injustices of the past and institute a perfect government (see Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-5; 16:5; 29:18-21). This is the reason for rejoicing. The psalmist went on to say that Messiah “shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.” The word “righteousness” in Hebrew is also translated as “justice” in the Old Testament, indicating that the Lord will exercise perfect justice. Everyone will be judged with “righteousness” or justly and with “his truth.” The word “truth” here can mean “faithfulness”
expressing the idea of complete dependability. Therefore, everyone can be assured that the Lord will rule with justice and faithfulness. This is yet another reason to praise our Lord and King. He is coming to do in this world what we could never do—bring justice and equity.

VI. Conclusion. Genuine worship is an encounter with God. A person who truly praises and worships God will be affected by it. Worship is not a performance. It is adoration inspired by God’s character and enabled by God’s Spirit. Worship allows us to focus on God, and this is what transforms or changes our lives (see II Corinthians 3:18). It also delivers us from the deceitful thought that anything or anyone other than God is worthy of our ultimate trust, attention, and adoration. Praise and worship produces humility, for it takes our attention off ourselves and places it where it belongs—on a truly Great God!

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