

Psalm 96

Is 6 v1 -8

Rev 4v 1 -11

The Lord is King

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord. Amen

When I was teaching full time my subject was Religious Education at secondary level and I was preparing students for GCSEs. I often wished that they had a good knowledge of the hymns that we sing in church as they would help so much with answering questions about what Christians believe about God. As I read the passages for this morning's sermon several hymns came instantly to mind...Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, early in the morning our song shall rise to thee; O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, bow down before him, his glory proclaim and the one we have sung: Praise my soul, the King of heaven, to his feet thy tribute bring, ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, who like me his praise should sing? Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise the everlasting King. I think that all these lines of poetry taken from the hymns encapsulate the teaching from the passages.

This is our fifth sermon in the series based on the Psalms. On reading through Psalm 96 you can't help but feel positivity and energy. Summed up the Psalm is a call to all nations to praise the Lord as the only God and to proclaim the glory of His reign throughout the world, His world, where He is King. The second part of this statement is prophetic, in that the Psalm is attributed to King David who lived 1000 years before Jesus and proclaiming God's glory to the world is the New Testament mission. Our mission.

The Psalm starts by asking all to sing the praise to God. 'Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord all the earth; sing to the Lord, praise his name'. The word sing is repeated for emphasis. Even if we can't carry the tune accurately we can all make a joyful noise and our joyful noise should be to give praise to God. The new song that should be sung is not necessarily new words or music but about the freshness of God's mercies. The forgiveness that God gives to us when we confess our sins and are truly repentant.

Then in v 3 the direction of the praise changes from being sung to God, to being directed to other people, about God. 'Declare his glory among the nations'. Originally the people of Israel would have been the intended recipients, but the Psalm indicates a broader audience. The song to be sung should be saying that God is worthy of praise and about His mighty deeds and that God should be 'feared'. John Castle in his first sermon explained that the word 'fear' should be translated as respect and God deserves our respect because He is above all else. He is the only God. He is the God who created the Earth and all that is in it. V5 states that the gods of the nations are idols and worthless. In David's time all nations worshipped their own gods, be they the god of the sun, moon, fertility, or harvest. This is still true today in many ways. Even in our lives now we must be careful about what we value and the respect that we give to God. Do we revere celebrity, possessions, money or lifestyles, to name but a few possible suspects, before God? Chances are that if you are listening to (or reading) this sermon, then no. But the temptations are there all too often.

V6 states that splendour and majesty are before God and strength and glory are in his sanctuary. These two pairs of divine attributes are personified as the throne attendants whose presence before the Lord heralds the exalted nature of the Universal King. This glory is shown in the readings from Isaiah and Revelation where the seraphs are representing the purity around God and the word 'Holy' is repeated three times to emphasis the glory of God which fills the earth. To be in God's presence is to be in the Holy of Holies; through Jesus we can be with God both in this life and the next. When we see the splendour of God's sanctuary we recognise our own unworthiness. We know that we are unclean and need to be cleansed,

that we have sinned and need to be forgiven. Manmade glory tends to have a temporary nature but God's heavenly glory never fades, neither does the strength with which He crowns the steadfast.

V 8 and 9 say three times that we should ascribe or literally give to God. Our way to God is by giving to him, we should give him praise, we should acknowledge Him for who He is; we should worship Him and tremble before Him. In this context, trembling means that we should be in reverent awe of Him, knowing just how powerful He is and how we are nothing without Him.

The Psalm is now moving to its climax. The first part of the Psalm has been about the call to God's people, now we are to learn of God's government and judgement. In the Old Testament perspective God's rule over creation and the affairs of people are seen as one. In Genesis, when the creation of the Earth was described it was described as being good. God saw that it was good. The world is firmly established and therefore what is in it is established too and because God's principles apply to the creation of the earth, they apply to the people who live on it. This means that God will be righteous, faithful and loving in his dealings with His followers. Regimes and governments installed by people will fade and pass but God's rule will be constant and fair. V10 says 'he will judge the peoples with equity'. God's Kingdom will have a perfect government that we should all rejoice in. God will rule in the hearts of all people, by the power of truth and the spirit of righteousness. The roaring of the sea and the singing of the forests are an indication that all of God's creation will rejoice when God's rule over all the people brings God's righteousness to full expression. V 13 says that God is coming to judge the Earth and its people. The people of Israel lived in the hope of God coming to judge his people and this was regularly in the message of the prophets. We know that he sent Jesus to give us a way back to God.

The Psalm is relevant for us today.

We need to take Jesus to our hearts and repent of our sins that we may help to bring about God's rule on Earth. We need to sing our praises to God. We need to give to God all that we can. We need to be His ambassadors in all that we do. He is worthy of worship above all other things, as the Creator of our world. He is our God and King. Maybe we should reflect and act on the words from Isaiah: 'Whom shall I send and who will go for us?' And Isaiah said 'Here I am send me'. We need to be the ones to stand up and proclaim that God is King.