

Christ's Advent in the Psalms

Worship in the Splendor of Holiness

Psalm 96:1-13

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Worship in the Splendor of Holiness

Scripture

Today is the Third Sunday of Advent in 2021. We continue in our sermon series, “Christ’s Advent in the Psalms.”

On this Third Sunday of Advent, I want to examine Psalm 96. You may recall in our study of the life of King David that after he had been anointed king over Judah and Israel, he brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. Some consider this to be one of the greatest highlights of David’s storied life. Thousands of people gathered to see the ark of the covenant. There were scores of priests. There were choirs and an orchestra. A massive celebration was held because the ark of the covenant was the visible sign of God’s presence with his people.

David composed a song of thanks for this wonderful occasion. That song is found in 1 Chronicles 16:8-36. The middle verses of that song (vv. 23-33) have been set into Psalm 96. Other portions of the song in 1 Chronicles are found in Psalms 105:1-5 and 106:1, 47-48.

The point of Psalm 96 is that it calls on God’s people to worship God in the splendor of holiness and to proclaim to the nations that the Lord is coming. This joyful Psalm pulsates with joy and expectation of the coming of the Lord.

Let us read Psalm 96:1-13:

- ¹ Oh sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth!**
- ² Sing to the Lord, bless his name;
tell of his salvation from day to day.**
- ³ Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous works among all the peoples!**

- ⁴ For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
he is to be feared above all gods.
- ⁵ For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols,
but the Lord made the heavens.
- ⁶ Splendor and majesty are before him;
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.
- ⁷ Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength!
- ⁸ Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts!
- ⁹ Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth!
- ¹⁰ Say among the nations, “The Lord reigns!
Yes, the world is established;
it shall never be moved;
he will judge the peoples with equity.”
- ¹¹ Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
- ¹² let the field exult, and everything in it!
Then shall all the trees of the forest
sing for joy
- ¹³ before the Lord, for he comes,
for he comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness,
and the peoples in his faithfulness. (Psalm
96:1-13)

Introduction

In an article for *Christian History*, Chris Armstrong writes:

I confess: as an adolescent, when my parents tried to impress on my two brothers and me the importance and the

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intricacies of Advent observance, I could hardly keep from rolling my eyes. In a country that spends its cold Decembers in hot pursuit of food, presents, and parties, the historical niceties of an ancient liturgical season seemed...well...*irrelevant*.

These days, on the other side of an evangelical conversion and nearly a decade of graduate study in church history, I've begun to see what excited my parents about Advent. I'm even entertaining the possibility that my own young family might benefit from an informed observance of Advent....

In fact, Advent season presents a unique opportunity to many Protestants. It's like the once-a-year conjunction of two planets: It brings a great mass of Bible-loving, praise-and-worshipping, extemporaneously praying born-again Protestant Christians into close contact with a big chunk of the historic church's liturgy. Even many non-liturgical Protestants don't think twice about joining in the season's rituals, old as well as new. They pull out and count off advent calendars, listen to lectionary sermon themes and Bible readings, and recite set prayers at the dinner table around candles in meaningful hues of purple and rose....

What is this thing called Advent?

Once upon a time, in fourth and fifth century Gaul and Spain, "Advent" was a preparation not for Christmas but for Epiphany. Epipha-what? That's the early-January celebration of such diverse events in Jesus's life as his Baptism, the miracle at Cana, and the visit of the Magi. In those days, Epiphany was set aside as an opportunity for new Christians to be baptized and welcomed into the church. So believers spent Advent's 40 days examining their hearts and doing penance.

It was not until the 6th century that Christians in Rome began linking this season explicitly to the coming of Christ. But at that time, and for centuries after, the "coming" that was celebrated was not the birth of Jesus, but his Second Coming. It was not until the Middle Ages that the church began using the Advent season to prepare to celebrate Christ's birth. And even then, this newer sense of the Lord's "advent"

or coming did not supplant the older sense – the Second Coming. And the muted, Lent-like mood of penitential preparation remained alongside the joyous anticipation of Jesus' birthday.

So, the modern liturgy divides Advent into a period, through December 16, during which the focus is Christ's Second Coming, and a period, from December 17 to the 24, focusing on His birth. It starts with sobering passages and prayers about the apocalyptic return of the Lord in judgment. Then it moves to Old Testament passages foretelling the birth of a messiah and New Testament passages trumpeting John the Baptist's exhortations and the angels' announcements.

Every year these rich Scriptural reminders and the traditional prayers that accompany them set my blood rushing a little faster and bring a rising excitement: Christ came with plenty of prior notice! Prophets and angels joined to proclaim his coming! And now I can join too, with the cloud of witnesses stretching back to apostolic times, in the same proclamation!

And in the protected, quiet times of meditation, I can respond as I imagine believers have done on every Advent since the tradition began: I can bow my head and prepare my heart to receive the One who is always present, but who seems distant in the busyness of the season. I can mourn for my hardness of heart. I can hope in his grace. And I can rejoice that in answer to the cry, "O come, O come, Emmanuel," he came. Would I really be able to do this – in the midst of December's commercial rush of lights, decorations, present-buying, and piped-in carols – without a gently insistent, weekly liturgical pattern? Maybe. But I'm not rolling my eyes any more.¹

I think that early in my Christian life, my attitude toward

¹ See <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2008/august/advent-close-encounters-of-liturgical-kind.html>.

Advent was a little Chris Armstrong's attitude. It seemed boring and irrelevant. But over the years, I have come to appreciate more and more the opportunity to take time to reflect on the meaning of Christ's Advent and what it means for me.

Today, we are looking at Psalm 96. The Psalmist gives four commands and backs up each command with a reason for their obedience.

Lesson

Psalm 96:1-13 shows us the coming of the Lord to rule as king over all the earth.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Let Us Sing! For the Lord Is Marvelous! (96:1-3)
2. Let Us Praise! For the Lord Is Great! (96:4-6)
3. Let Us Worship! For the Lord Is Glorious! (96:7-9)
4. Let Us Rejoice! For the Lord Is Coming! (96:10-13)

I. Let Us Sing! For the Lord Is Marvelous! (96:1-3)

First, let us sing! For the Lord is marvelous!

The great nineteenth century preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, called Psalm 96 "a grand *Missionary Hymn*."² Verse 1 begins with these words, "**Oh sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth!**" The Psalmist exuberantly invites all people all over the earth to sing a new song to the Lord. The glad tidings of joy have been proclaimed to the nations. People have come to know the saving grace of God. They don't sing the tawdry songs of yesterday because

² C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Psalms 88-110*, vol. 4 (London; Edinburgh; New York: Marshall Brothers, n.d.), 180.

they have been exchanged for the gospel songs of today.

One of my professors at seminary was Robert Coleman. He was an interesting lecturer. He would get so enraptured by Jesus and the good news of the Gospel that it was hard to take notes. One just sat and listened in awe and amazement as we could see the beauty of Jesus gripping him. Dr. Coleman often said, “When Jesus comes into your life, he puts a spring in your step [and here he would hop up and down on his toes] and a song in your heart!” And isn’t that true? When I became a Christian at the age of nineteen, I stopped singing pub songs and now loved to sing a new song – a new song about Jesus and all that he had done for me.

Verse 2 goes on to call God’s people to sing about the conversion of all the nations, **“Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.”** Three times in verses 1-2 does the Psalmist call God’s people to **“sing to the Lord.”** God’s people have a song to sing. They have been rescued from eternal damnation and they will be with the Lord for all eternity. That is good news! That is cause for rejoicing! That is cause for singing! Moreover, the Psalmist wants the people of God to **“tell of his salvation from day to day.”**

Charles Spurgeon writes, “The gospel is the clearest revelation of himself, salvation outshines creation and providence; therefore let our praises overflow in that direction.”³

In verse 3, the Psalmist writes, **“Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!”** God’s people are to declare the greatness and goodness and mercy and sovereignty of God to all peoples. However, they are especially to declare the good news of the gospel, now that all the promises have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

³ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Psalms 88-110*, vol. 4, 181.

God is supremely glorified when people are told what he has done to bring rebellious sinners back into a relationship with himself.

Spurgeon writes, “The gospel is a mass of wonders, its history is full of wonders, and it is in itself far more marvelous than miracles themselves.”⁴

So, let us sing! For the Lord is marvelous!

II. Let Us Praise! For the Lord Is Great! (96:4-6)

Second, let us praise! For the Lord is great!

The Psalmist writes in verse 4, **“For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods.”** The Psalmist acknowledges the greatness of the LORD. He is no regional deity. He is no domestic god. He is no departmental god. He is the LORD of all! He is the supreme, sovereign God over all the earth and all the people and everything! That is why he is to be praised and to be feared above all gods.

The Psalmist goes on to write in verses 5-6, **“For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.”** The gods of the nations have been fashioned by the imaginations of the people. The gods are utterly useless. They cannot do anything. In contrast, the LORD created all things, including people and, as the Psalmist says, the heavens. That is why splendor and majesty are before him. He is the true God and he alone is worthy of praise and adoration.

So, let us sing! For the Lord is marvelous! And, let us

⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Psalms 88-110*, 182.

praise! For the Lord is great!

III. Let Us Worship! For the Lord Is Glorious! (96:7-9)

Third, let us worship! For the Lord is glorious!

The Psalmist writes in verses 7-8, **“Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts!”** Psalm 96 began with the Psalmist saying three times, “Sing to the Lord” (vv. 1 [2x], 2). Now, in verses 7-8, the Psalmist says three times, **“Ascribe to the LORD.”** People all over the world are called to ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. There is only one who is truly glorious, and that is our God. And there is only one who is truly strong, and that is our God. No person and no government can claim what rightly belongs to the One who has created heaven and earth and all that is in them. Only God can save to the uttermost. Therefore, he alone is the One to whom we are to ascribe the glory and strength that are rightly due to his wonderful name.

The Psalmist writes in verse 9, **“Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!”** One might expect the Psalmist to exhort God’s people to worship him in the splendor of a magnificent temple or an architectural marvel. But he does not. He exhorts God’s people to worship him in **“the splendor of holiness.”** That is, God’s people must be set apart by God and for God to worship him well. Those who worship God must pay attention to their spiritual condition when they worship their God.

So, let us sing! For the Lord is marvelous! Let us praise! For the Lord is great! And let us worship! For the Lord is glorious!

IV. Let Us Rejoice! For the Lord Is Coming! (96:10-13)

And finally, let us rejoice! For the Lord is coming!

The Psalmist writes in verse 10, **“Say among the nations, ‘The LORD reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity.’ ”** God’s people are to declare to all people everywhere that God rules. All the nations that surrounded ancient Israel in the time of the Psalmist had their own local gods. They may have had ambitions of international conquest. However, only the LORD is the true God. He alone reigns over all. He is the only one who judges the people with equity and justice.

The Psalmist writes in verses 11-13, **“Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness.”** All of creation is personified and exhorted to delight and be glad in the coming of the LORD. The idea of **“judge”** here is “to set all things to right.” The order that God had created before the Fall will once again be restored.

The First Advent of Jesus brought our Savior to this earth to live and die for his people. He secured salvation for his elect. Jesus’ Second Advent will bring a conclusion to the present world order. Jesus’ Second Advent will inaugurate the time in which **“he will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness.”** He will set all things to right.

The question we must all answer is: Am I ready for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Psalm 96:1-13, let us be prepared for the Second Advent of Jesus.

Theologian Dale Bruner writes:

David Peterson, former pastor at the First Presbyterian Church in Spokane, Washington, told about a time when he was preparing his sermon. His little daughter came in and said, “Daddy, can we play?”

He answered, “I’m awfully sorry, Sweetheart, but I’m right in the middle of preparing this sermon. In about an hour I can play.”

She said, “Okay, when you’re finished, Daddy, I am going to give you a great big hug.”

He said, “Thank you very much.” She went to the door and (these are his words) “Then she did a U-turn and came back and gave me a chiropractic, bone-breaking hug.” David said to her, “Darling, you said you were *going* to give me a hug *after* I finished.”

She answered, “Daddy, I just wanted you to know what you have to look forward to!”

One meaning of Christmas is that God wants us to know, through this First Coming, how much we have to look forward to in the great Second Coming.⁵

Are you ready for the Second Advent of Jesus? The way to prepare for the Second Advent is to repent of your sin and to trust in him alone for salvation as he is offered in the gospel. I urge you to do so today. Amen.

⁵ Dale Bruner, “Is Jesus Inclusive or Exclusive?” *Theology, News, and Notes* (October 1999), 3.

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is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons.
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp.
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