

Psalm 96 “He Came to His Own”  
Psalm 96/97  
John 1:1-13

December 3, 2017

Since I’ve already preached on Psalm 97, we won’t have a separate sermon on it this time.

But we will sing it today –  
since it continues the theme, here in book 4,  
of God’s kingship – God’s reign.

Psalm 93 opened with the words, “The LORD reigns” –  
Psalm 94 spoke of God as the “judge of all the earth.”  
Psalm 95 declared “the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.”  
Psalm 96 says, “Say among the nations, ‘The LORD reigns’”

And now Psalm 97 opens with the same words as Psalm 93 –  
“The LORD reigns”

God is the King.

And the result of God’s Kingship is justice and righteousness for all the earth!

Psalm 97:2 uses imagery from the book of Exodus – from Mt. Sinai –  
the clouds and thick darkness that surrounded God at Sinai (97:2),  
the fire, the lightning, the glory of the LORD –  
as well as the reminder of the golden calf (worshippers of images).

Psalm 97:2 also draws on language from Psalm 89 –  
89:14 says of *David* – that righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne.  
97:2 says the same of God’s throne.

In other words, Psalm 97:2 wants you to connect God’s throne with David’s throne –  
and also wants you to see that the God who appeared to Moses at Sinai  
is coming once more to judge all the nations.

He comes to judge the world in righteousness – and the peoples in his faithfulness.

Sing Psalm 97  
Read John 1:1-13

Book 4 of the Psalter is just a whole lot of fun!

Some people think that it is rooted in the Exodus.  
Psalm 90 is called a “prayer of Moses, the man of God.”  
Psalm 95 reminds us of Meribah and Massah.  
Psalm 99 refers to Moses and Aaron.  
There are echoes of the Song of the Sea (Ex 15) all over these psalms.

Indeed, Moses is referred to more often in Book 4,  
than in all other Psalms together.  
But others say that Book 4 is really rooted in Psalm 89 –  
practically every song in Book 4 takes over themes and images from Psalm 89  
and answers the question of *how* God is still faithful –  
even though there is no Davidic King on the throne.

Of course, the two themes go together very easily!  
The return from exile – after all – was supposed to be a New Exodus!

That's also why Book 4 of the Psalms works really well in Advent!  
It especially works really well with John's gospel –  
because John is not talking about the *details* of the birth of Jesus.  
Rather, John is talking about how the world needed the Word to become flesh.  
In the same way that Psalms 96 and 97 speak of the universal reign of the LORD –  
and how *all the earth* is to tremble before him (96:9) –  
the mountains themselves melt like wax *before the Lord of all the earth* (97:5) –  
indeed, even the *gods* are called to worship the LORD (97:7).

John tells us that in the beginning was the Word,  
and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God.  
He was in the beginning with God.

In the beginning, when God created all things –  
the Word was there.  
All things were made through him.  
Yes, the Father is one who created all things –  
but he created all things through his Word.  
The eternal Word of God – the second person of the blessed Trinity –  
is the one by whom and through whom the Father made all things.

Without him was not any thing made that was made.

John is highlighting the same themes as Book 4 of the Psalms:  
the Creator is our Savior.  
The one through whom the heavens were made  
is the one who has now come in our flesh.

And indeed, there is another theme here in John 1 that we see in Psalm 96:  
“He came to his own [place] but his own [people] did not receive him.”  
Remember the backdrop of the exile – how Israel had refused to hear the Word.  
And now Psalm 96 speaks of how the families of the peoples  
ascribe glory and strength to Yahweh.

“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name,  
he gave the right to become children of God,  
who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man,  
but of God.”

The Psalmist clearly sees that the *nations* – the Gentiles – will worship the LORD  
in his holy temple!  
They will turn aside from their vain idols to worship the living and true God!

And that is what we celebrate this Advent!  
(Can I get an Amen?!)  
(How about a Hallelujah!?)

Because the very first thing that we see in Psalm 96  
is the call to sing to the LORD a new song –  
and notice who is called to sing:  
“all the earth!”

Psalm 95 had focused on Israel –  
“Oh come, let *us* sing to the LORD”  
And the identity of the “us” is very clear:  
“do not harden your hearts... as when *your fathers put me to the test.*”  
Psalm 95 remembers *Israel’s* special relationship to God.

But Psalm 96 highlights the universal scope of God’s kingdom!  
Each of the three sections of the Psalm maintains this focus:  
Sing to the LORD, all the earth (v1)  
Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples (v7)  
Say among the nations, ‘The LORD reigns’ (v10).

### **1. “Sing a New Song” – Declaring the Mighty Deeds of God among the Nations (v1-6)**

*Oh sing to the LORD a new song;  
sing to the LORD, all the earth!*

In verses 1-3, “all the earth” is called to do four things:  
sing, bless, tell, and declare.

First, “sing to the LORD a new song.”  
The point here is *not* that “all the earth” should *write* a new song.  
Rather, it is that they should *sing* a new song!

After all, if you are supposed to *write* a new song,  
then you should not be *singing* this song!  
And so after singing the first line,  
you should immediately stop singing *this song* – and improvise something new!!

The idea here is that “all the earth” has been singing *the same old songs*.  
They have been singing to Marduk and Baal and Zeus.  
They have been declaring the praises of gods that are *not gods*.  
(verse 5 – “for the gods of the peoples are worthless idols”).

You know how you get a song stuck in your head?  
And then all day that tune is running through your head!  
Well, that’s the *old song* – that’s the song that exalts the old gods  
the worthless idols that you *once* loved.

*Stop singing* “Cheer, cheer for old Notre Dame” –  
and sing a *new song* – sing Psalm 96, for instance!

The language of the new song is found in 6 psalms (33, 40, 96, 98, 144, and 149).  
In each case, the focus of the song is on how God has *done* something new!  
and so people who used to sing old songs –  
people who once had little or nothing to sing about –  
can now lift up their voices anew.  
We celebrate God’s victory!

Last time we saw that the “joyful noise” of Psalm 95 was the “victory shout.”  
The “new song,” in that way, is related to the “joyful noise.”

Now – there is nothing *wrong* with writing new songs!  
It is a good thing to write songs that proclaim the great and mighty deeds of God!  
The point is simply that “sing a new song” is not actually a command  
to write a new song...

<sup>2</sup> *Sing to the LORD, bless his name;  
tell of his salvation from day to day.*

Verse two then gives three verbs of command:  
Sing, bless, and tell.

Notice that there are two different directions here.  
First, sing *to* the LORD – the LORD God is the one *to whom* we sing.  
When we sing, we are often singing *to God*.  
And together with that is the command to “bless his name.”  
We *bless God* because he has blessed us.  
We *say good things* about God’s name  
because God’s name is holy –  
in this way, “bless his name” is very closely related to the Lord’s Prayer:  
“hallowed be thy name.”

But then the third verb directs us outward –  
“tell of his salvation from day to day.”

In our singing there needs to be both the vertical direction:  
sing to the LORD, bless his name,  
and the horizontal – singing to one another – direction:  
“tell of his salvation.”

Some people have thought that all of our singing needs to be directed to God.  
They say things like, “in worship, God is the audience, we are the performers.”

But that loses sight of the fact that the Triune God *meets* with us in worship!  
God himself speaks and acts when we gather in his presence!  
And furthermore, the Triune God meets with *us* in worship!  
We are not merely a collection of isolated individuals –  
we are joined together as one body, one bride.

In worship, we are called to love the LORD our God with all our heart, soul, and strength –  
and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

We do that by singing to the LORD – and by telling of his salvation from day to day.

Verse 3 then fleshes this out another step.  
In case you wondered *to whom* should I tell of his salvation:

<sup>3</sup> *Declare his glory among the nations,  
his marvelous works among all the peoples!*

You can see here the roots of the Great Commission.  
Make disciples of all nations!  
Proclaim the gospel – the good news of the mighty deeds of God!

There is a strong *outward* face to Psalm 96.

Verses 4-6 then give the reasons *why* we should do all this!

<sup>4</sup> *For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;  
he is to be feared above all gods.*

<sup>5</sup> *For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols,  
but the LORD made the heavens.*

First, in verse 4, we see the greatness of the LORD.  
He has done great and mighty deeds –  
in the Exodus – in the return from exile –  
and most gloriously in the incarnation of his Son.  
And because the LORD is great, he is greatly to be praised.

And second, we should praise God  
because all the gods of the nations are worthless idols.  
We have already seen in Psalm 95 that the LORD is a great king above all gods.  
The gods of the nations are *nothing* compared to the LORD.  
The same theme is proclaimed in verse 4 –  
“he is to be feared above all gods.”  
But then verse 5 goes a step further:  
“For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols.”  
The word translated “worthless idols”  
is a single word in Hebrew that is compounded of the word “not”  
and the word “god.”  
“Worthless idol” is a perfectly good translation –  
but “ungods” might be better.  
“All the gods of the peoples are ungod.” (Alter, 339)

After all, the LORD made the heavens.  
The gods of the nations made nothing!  
Compared with the LORD God who made heaven and earth,  
the gods of the nations are truly ungod!

And then verse 6 gives a third reason why we should sing praise to God:

<sup>6</sup> *Splendor and majesty are before him;  
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.*

This is where the real fun starts!  
Because Book 4 is located after the exile.  
The prophet Haggai tells us that the splendor and glory of the second temple was nothing  
compared to the splendor and glory of Solomon’s temple.  
Indeed, those who had seen the glory of the first temple  
*wept* over the second temple, because it was such a *small thing*.  
It had no splendor and majesty.

But Haggai said that the glory of the latter temple would be *greater*  
than the glory of Solomon’s temple.

And Psalm 96 agrees:  
“Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.”  
Psalm 96 remembers what Solomon had said:  
“heaven of heavens cannot contain you –  
how much less this house that I have built?”

But Psalm 96 is not just punting into an ethereal realm of divinity!  
Our text is still firmly grounded in the earthly sanctuary.

And we see this in our central point about entering the courts of the LORD – where our Psalmist calls *us* (Gentiles) to enter the temple and worship!

## 2. “Worship the LORD in the Splendor of Holiness” – Entering His Courts (v7-9)

<sup>7</sup> *Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,  
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!*

<sup>8</sup> *Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;  
bring an offering, and come into his courts!*

<sup>9</sup> *Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;<sup>[a]</sup>  
tremble before him, all the earth!*

What is this saying?!

Well, Psalm 96 – or something very much like it – is found in 1 Chronicles 16,

when David “first appointed that thanksgiving be sung to the LORD by Asaph and his brothers.”

1 Chronicles 16 includes portions of Psalms 105, 96, and 106.

But as many have pointed out,

the Chronicler is not necessarily saying that these are the words that were sung then.

Rather, this is the *sort of song* that was sung that day. (cf. J. A. Alexander, 396)

At the very least, 1 Chronicles 16 – when David brings the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem – is the sort of occasion that should prompt this sort of song!

Indeed, the LXX title for this song includes the phrase,

“when the house was built after the captivity” –

in other words, after the exile – when they rebuilt the temple in the days of Zerubbabel.

So it is entirely possible that Psalm 96 was sung on the day when Haggai spoke of the future glory of this second temple!

And clearly, Psalm 96 is designed to be sung *in the temple*.

But think back to verse 3:

“declare his glory among the nations” –

but verse 8 says “bring an offering and come into his courts.”

So how does this work?

Do we go out to the nations?

Or do we come into the temple?

This is why the usage of Psalm 96 in 1 Chronicles 16 is so important!

It might seem as though singing praise to God in a worship service

has nothing to do with declaring his praises among the nations –  
but God seems to think otherwise!

Because when we gather to sing God’s praises here in worship,  
we are confessing him as King –  
we are acknowledging his Lordship –  
we are declaring that we are going to *live* under his rule.

That’s why I said that Psalm 96 connects well with the Great Commission:

“Make disciples of the nations,  
baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,  
and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

When the church of Jesus Christ *worships him* –  
the result *must be* that the good news of salvation goes forth to the ends of the earth.

I realize that you may misunderstand what I just said.

Because in our day, there is a certain misunderstanding of what “worship” is.  
There are churches that talk about the “worship time” (by which they mean the singing),  
and the “teaching time” (by which they mean the sermon).  
Worship – according to the scriptures – includes the *whole* of what we do in the service.  
Further, worship includes not only the *outward acts* –  
but also the inward disposition (as we saw last week!).

So I am not *at all* saying that the worship service is the only place  
where the good news of salvation goes forth to the ends of the earth!  
Rather, where the new song of salvation is sung –  
where the glory of the LORD is declared –  
where the marvelous works of God are proclaimed –  
there the LORD himself dwells in the midst of his people,  
so that strength and beauty fill his people (his sanctuary).

After all, where *is* the sanctuary?

Why did Haggai say that the glory of the latter temple  
would be greater than the glory of the former temple?  
Because there came a day when a young woman brought her infant son to that temple.  
And Simeon took that child in his arms and blessed him,  
singing the new song of God’s mighty deeds:  
“Lord, now let your servant depart in peace,  
according to your word;  
for my eyes have seen your salvation  
that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and for glory to your people Israel.” (Luke 2:29-32)



The glory of the LORD came to *that* temple in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And Jesus himself made it clear that *he* was the temple –

he was the sanctuary – the place where earth and heaven meet in one person!

“Destroy this temple, and I will rebuild it in three days!”

After all, where do *we* gather for worship?

We don’t go to some earthly temple.

We go to the heavenly temple –

we go to where *Jesus is!*

And because we have been united to Christ,

therefore we are living stones being built together

into a holy dwelling place for God.

*We* become a holy temple – we become the place where earth and heaven meet!

Because Christ dwells in *you*.

And so wherever you go – in whatever place you may find yourself this week –

the life of the resurrected Christ goes with you.

The Holy Spirit goes with you!

If we are the temple of the Triune God –

then the worship of the Triune God must also go with us wherever we go!

The splendor of holiness is reflected in you wherever you go!

In one sense, Psalm 96 says *nothing* about the ethical quality of your life!

There is *nothing here* about how “you need to try harder and do better...”

Because Psalm 96 understands that you *already know* that you are a screw up!

You’ve lived through Psalm 89 –

you've lived through Lamentations – the Exile –

and you fully understand that the wages of sin is death!

So Psalm 96 focuses entirely on *worship* –

singing praise to God for *his* marvelous deeds!

declaring *his* glory among the nations!

Because when you worship him – when your heart is properly oriented to the LORD your God –

then you cannot help but to live the way he says!

Our final section (verses 10-13) then turns to the future.

One more time we are told to speak to the nations:

### **3. “The LORD Reigns” – The Creator Is Coming to Judge (v10-13)**

<sup>10</sup> *Say among the nations, “The LORD reigns!”*

Psalm 93 and Psalm 97 each begin with that line.

And as we saw in Psalm 93,  
when we say, “The LORD reigns” –  
we are not saying, “The LORD has always reigned” –  
rather, we are saying that the Kingdom of God – the reign of God –  
has come in a new and refreshing way!

In that way, when the Psalmist says, “The LORD reigns”  
it is very much like when Jesus says, “The Kingdom of God is at hand.”

On the other hand, the second part of verse 10 focuses on the way things have *always* been:

*Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved;*

As Creator, God is King from all eternity.

And because God rules all things from all eternity,  
therefore we can have confidence that this *new thing* that he is doing  
will bring justice to all the earth.

As verse 10 concludes:

*he will judge the peoples with equity.”*

And this sparks the glorious crescendo of praise in verses 11-13!

Because if you look around at all the mess that exists in this world,  
you have to be delighted at the thought that someday  
this will all be sorted out –  
and God will bring *justice* to all peoples!

<sup>11</sup> *Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;  
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;*

Notice that all three parts of creation are called to respond:

let the heavens be glad –  
let the earth rejoice –  
let the sea roar –  
and all that fills it!

Indeed, verse 12, then adds the things that fill the earth as well:

<sup>12</sup> *let the field exult, and everything in it!  
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy*

All creation rejoices at the coming of the King!  
Paul will draw on this theme in Romans 8 –  
“the creation waits with eager longing  
for the revelation of the sons of God.”

And in that day, all the trees of the forest sing for joy

<sup>13</sup> *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.*

There is a resounding optimism in this Psalm.

People sometimes ask me “Will most people be saved, or will most people be damned.”

You can find scriptures that *point* both directions!

Jesus said, “Narrow is the way and few are they who find it.” (Mt 7:14)

He also said, “Many are called, but few are chosen.” (Mt 22:14)

And yet Psalm 96 seems to think that nations should be *glad*

that the LORD is coming to judge the world!

And I don’t think that Psalm 96 is saying that the nations should be glad  
that they are going to hell!

I don’t pretend to know what God has not revealed!

I barely have a handle on what he *has* revealed!

But what is clear from the scriptures

is that we will be *delighted* – not just grudgingly okay –

with God’s justice and faithfulness on the final day.

The pattern that you see in the book of Revelation

is that the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus will continue to grow and spread –

but at the same time, persecution will increase and get worse.

Kingdom and tribulation go hand in hand.

You might think, “if the vast majority of people were Christians,  
then there wouldn’t be any persecution!”

(But if you know *anything* about European history over the last thousand years,

then you know that for a thousand years, the vast majority of Europeans were Christians –  
and yet that didn’t stop persecution!)

“O God, the Maker of heaven, Creator of earth,

to whom all the earth sings the melody of a new song,

we ask you to purify us from the defilement of our sin,

so that with a pure mind and voice we may always sing to you.

Let all the earth sing a new song to you, O LORD,

because you have redeemed the whole world

through the blood of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ;

so that we, who are buried with him by baptism into his death,

may rejoice together with him in unbounded joy.

Let the multitude of the redeemed sing unto you, for you have wrought new wonders:  
new light has sprung from the Virgin,  
    which, however, was not new as to the Godhead,  
        but was new in the display of the mystery of regeneration,  
            whereby you renew the world;  
a new mode of humility and patience amidst the pride of the oppressors,  
a new and wondrous kind of power in the glory of the Resurrection,  
    when you bore the one who was very man and very God to the heights of heaven.  
Grant, by the power of your Holy Spirit, that we may ever sing our new song to you  
as we declare the mighty deeds of your glorious Son,  
    in whose name we pray. Amen. [From Neale, 246]