

February 11, 2018
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Psalms
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from Psalm 98.

1. Describe the characteristics of the “new song” especially in light of Revelation 5:9 and 14:3.
2. What marvelous things has the Lord done, and what among those things is the most marvelous thing?
3. What songs come to your mind when you think about God’s marvelous work of salvation?
4. How has God made known His salvation to the world?
5. How does knowledge about God’s righteousness impact an individual as well as a culture?
6. According to this psalm, what is the acceptable response to a clear understanding of the Lord’s work of salvation?

SING ABOUT THE LORD’S SALVATION
Psalm 98

If you are Cleveland Browns fan, you have hope. In fact, hope is the only thing you have. The Browns have been the sorriest team in the NFL for a long time now. This past season they did not win a single game. In 2016 they won one game, which was preceded by a 3-13 record the season before that. The season of 2014 might have given a glimmer of hope when they won almost half their games (7-

9). But the Brown’s fans remembered that even that meager accomplishment was preceded by seasons of 4-12; 5-11; 5-11; 4-12; 5-11. Yes, hope is all they have.

But I can remember the glory years of the Cleveland Browns when I was growing up about 90 miles away. Back in the “60’s” they were always a winning team, often vying for the championship game with Green Bay or the Colts who were perennial powerhouses. Those were the days of the great Jim Brown who ran up and down the field scoring touchdowns and setting records.

The people of Israel felt like that at times – longing with fading hope for the glory days. Since the destruction of the Theocracy-Monarchy in 586 B.C., devout Israelites have longed for the glory days. Devout Israelites still place much hope in God’s promise to David that someone from His lineage will rule in Israel again (2 Samuel 7). They still read the last half of Isaiah’s prophecy with hope, looking for the promised King of Kings who will judge the earth in righteousness.

The astonishing part of the story is that God sent the promised King of Kings to live among them and to offer them salvation, but they rejected Him. He wasn’t the kind of Prophet, Priest, King, and Judge they were looking for. Even more astonishing is that, in sending the King to the people of Israel, the Triune God sent the Savior for sinners to redeem them from sin’s power and penalty. What can we say about such salvation? How can we respond?

According to Psalm 98 we respond with great rejoicing, with a new and fitting song, that recalls the amazing work of God’s salvation. Let’s spend a few moments this morning fixing our minds on and renewing our hope in the completion of our salvation when the Judge comes to judge His creation.

The Lord Has Done Marvelous Things (vv.1-3).

Sing a song worthy of the LORD’s salvation (v.1). As we have learned in previous studies, this psalm speaks of singing a song that is distinct in quality to the LORD. *Oh sing to the LORD a new song (v.1a)*. This psalm begins with words very similar to Psalm 96, which is a companion psalm, and which also calls upon us to sing a new

song to the LORD. The same command shows up in Psalms 33, 40, 144 and 149, as well as Isaiah 42:10.

Maybe most interesting is the fact that the idea of the new song, the distinct song is found in the “last days” scenes also. It is there in *Revelation 5:9* when Jesus Christ, the Lamb slain, steps forward to take the scroll, which is the title deed to creation, which He redeems by His sacrifice, all beings in heaven’s throne room burst out in a new song. It is a distinct song fitting for the occasion. Again the new song shows up in *Revelation 14:3* where, in the midst of the Great Tribulation, the Lamb Jesus Christ stands on Mount Zion with the 144,000 sealed witnesses and they, as well as the beings in heaven, burst out in a new song. This too is a distinct song fit for the occasion. But it is also called a song that no one other than the redeemed in heaven, the four living creatures and the 144,000 sealed witnesses could learn.

These new songs must be songs about salvation. They are just that, songs about salvation that are sung to the LORD. Only the Lord of salvation deserves such songs. That is the songwriter’s argument according to the end of the first verse. We are to sing to the LORD because *He has done marvelous things (v.1b)*! It is true that a thorough consideration of God’s works of creation must result in praise because His work is marvelous. So, too, God’s works among humans throughout history are marvelous. But what is the most marvelous thing God does? The word for *marvelous* means surpassing, extraordinary, and even incomprehensible. Not surprisingly the word is regularly used to refer to acts of God in cosmic achievements. It also speaks of God’s acts in behalf of Israel.

But what is the most marvelous thing God does? The last part of verse one reveals that the most marvelous work of God is His salvation. *His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for Him (v.1b)*. References to God’s right hand and holy arm speak of God’s personal, intimate involvement in working out salvation. Salvation is God’s personal work for God’s glory. In my opinion the pronoun Him at the end of the sentence should be capitalized because it refers to God.

The marvel of salvation is that it is wholly the work of God for Himself. We naturally think salvation is about us who need saving. It is true that we who receive God’s salvation certainly do benefit

eternally. But the marvelous work that deserves our praise is all about God. That is why the work of salvation should draw praise, glory, adoration unto God.

What is this work of salvation? The word *salvation* could be used to describe God intervening in the circumstances of one of His servants, like David, to deliver him from the lion, the bear, the giant, or personal enemies. Salvation can also refer to God intervening for the nation of Israel to save them from their enemies.

But the great marvel of the work of salvation is God saving sinners from sin. Ask a person if he has been saved, and an expected and right response would be, “Saved from what?” The answer to that question is “Sin, its power and its penalty.” Sin is simply a missing of God’s standard of righteousness. It began with Adam and Eve who chose to disobey God’s clear command about eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. As soon as they missed God’s standard of righteousness, the entire perfect creation was marred by offense against the Perfect Creator. As a result, every single person born since that moment has been born in sin, born with the propensity and desire to offend God.

This sinful condition has serious consequences. First, the result of sin is spiritual death which is experienced as unresponsiveness toward God. Second, the result of sin is physical death. That is precisely what God had warned Adam about. God warned that “dying you shall die” and indeed we are each born dying. The third consequence of sin is eternal death. Eternal death is never ending punishment and suffering while being forever separated from God, consigned to the lake of fire with Satan and demons. The great need is to be saved from this!

This natural depravity, this natural bent toward unrighteousness, is universal and thorough. It is universal in that no one is born NOT depraved. Paul wrote in the third chapter of Romans, *As it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” “Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way*

of peace they have not known.” “There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Romans 3:10-18).

Natural depravity is thorough in that we are spiritually dead and incapable of responding to God and all that He reveals to us about Himself. It is not that we sinners lack information about God. God has been very faithful to reveal His character to us through the creation, in our conscience, in His Word, and especially through Jesus Christ the Son. But in spite of all of God’s self-revelation, we sinners remain unchanged. That is because we are spiritually dead and, therefore, unresponsive.

God also reveals how spiritually dead we are. Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians, *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (Ephesians 2:1-3).* People who are dead physically cannot respond to physical stimuli. People who are dead spiritually are incapable of responding to spiritual stimuli. That we need to be saved from such a condition should be self-evident.

How to be saved is the problem. Because we are spiritually dead, even when we hear God’s Word and become convicted about sin, what can we possibly do? Because there is no good work possible that can make us right with God, what can we do? We are all utterly lost and hopeless unless the LORD does something for us. That the LORD does for us what we cannot do for ourselves is the theme of this psalm.

This psalm, like many others, praises God that through the LORD’S incredible grace and mercy, *His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for Him.* That means that because God is gracious and merciful, in His sovereign wisdom He chooses to grant spiritual life, understanding, knowledge to sinners who are incapable of responding to Him. Again Paul taught the Ephesian Christians, *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ*

Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Ephesian 2:4-9).

Jesus also explained this marvelous work of salvation like this: *“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day . . . For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. . . No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:37-40,44).*

The person who has not experienced this marvelous miracle of salvation does not grasp the glory of it all. He doesn’t understand what is so great about it. To him, salvation is just a choice a person makes to be religious or not to be religious. At best, he can experience the guilt of sin, but then chooses to embrace moralism. At worst, he responds to his guilt of sin that God graciously gave him by determining to do whatever is necessary to force God to save him.

We who have been blessed with God’s grace in salvation respond quite differently than that. We whom God the Father has drawn to the Savior, who have received life from Him rejoice. That is why this psalm is overflowing with joy and rejoicing. Praising the LORD because of this marvelous work of His salvation is the only possible response we could have. And the more we grasp the wonder of it all, the more overwhelming it becomes to us. If you believe that you are truly saved because you make good decisions or because you are wiser than the rest of the sinners, you will be content to mumble empty platitudes about meaningless creeds. But to us who are saved by the power and grace of God’s arm in salvation, we are overwhelmed by His mercy and grace. We cannot help but sing it out!

And even more amazing is that the LORD has made His salvation known (vv.2-3). Verses two and three contain three statements to that effect. First, *the LORD has made known His salvation (v.2a).* What glory would it be to the Creator to hide His

work of redeeming His fallen creation? The miracle of salvation is not a secret rite of initiation. The recipients of this marvelous salvation are not supposed to be a secret order or a subculture.

Through His Word God has plainly declared His work of salvation. At the moment God confronted the first sin, He promised the work of salvation to Satan who indwelt the serpent. He said, *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel”* (Genesis 3:15). That was God’s Word. Does God keep His Word?

For centuries God pictured the work of salvation through vicarious sacrifices. Throughout the Bible history God kept promising the Savior who would provide the final acceptable sacrifice for sin, His own blood. For the past 2,000 years messengers who have received this miracle of salvation have boldly declared it. It is not that the work of salvation is not known. Rather, when the good news of salvation is declared or shared, it is typically rejected. Rather than gladly embrace the good news people set about to establish a false work of salvation.

Second, He has revealed that His salvation is righteousness. *He has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations* (v.2b). To reveal is to uncover. God has uncovered His righteousness. Spiritually dead, sinful, offending people cannot by their own power discover God’s righteousness. All we know by nature is sin, which is the missing of God’s standard of righteousness.

But God has made His righteousness known to the nations. The term *nations* typically refers to the unregenerate people as a whole. That is everyone by nature. That God has indeed uncovered His righteousness is obvious through the laws of nations. Consider the governing laws of tribes settled in the deep jungles with no access to the truth of God’s Word (they are pretty barbaric). The more impact the Bible, the Word of God has on a culture, the more their laws reflect the teaching and character of God. Take away the Bible influence and you will notice a perceptible departure from righteousness. And so the declension goes until you end up with anarchy in which every man does that which is right in his own eyes. But even with that, people groups are often governed by the law of God written on their consciences.

God’s righteousness is know most obviously through His work of salvation. He is right to condemn sin. He is right to name the price to redeem victims out of sin. He is right to keep His Word and grant salvation to every single person to whom He gives life.

Third, is the truth that God’s righteousness in salvation is based on His faithfulness. *He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel* (v.3a). God reveals His righteousness through His steadfast love and faithfulness. These two terms reveal that God will keep His Word according to all that He has promised. If God fails to do what He said in His Word, He is not righteous. Because He is faithful, He proves He is righteous, and we are unrighteous not to trust Him.

That brings us to the startling conclusion about the LORD’s righteousness. Everyone knows this! Again notice, *He has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations* (v.2b). There have been manifold evidences and testimonies to God’s salvation. So many that *All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God* (v.3b). Therefore, all people are left without excuse. That was the warning from God the Son: *“If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin”* (John 15:22). God has leveled the same warning through His creation. *For His invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse* (Romans 1:20). And if all that was not enough, God has written His righteous standard on the conscience. *They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them* (Romans 2:15).

The LORD has accomplished the marvelous work of salvation. The LORD has made this marvelous work known. The LORD has made His work of salvation known to me and in me. How should we respond to this wonderful truth?

The Acceptable Response To The LORD’s Wonderful Works (vv.4-9).

Even as the first ten verses of Psalm 96 were part of the song sung by the choirs when the ark was brought to Jerusalem, so too do we find verses four through nine of this psalm represented in the last part of that song the choirs sang on that glorious day. Consider the last part of the song the people sang on that occasion (1 Chronicles 16:32-35). *Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever! Say also: "Save us, O God of our salvation, and gather and deliver us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name, and glory in your praise"* (1 Chronicles 16:32-35). Many of the words look quite like the words of this song. That is why Psalm 98 is considered to be the companion song to Psalm 96.

Here we are encouraged again that everyone ought to break out in praise to the LORD. Or more precisely, to break forth into joyous noise. *Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises!* (v.4). Joyful singing and praise is the theme of this last section of the psalm. Some form of joy is found four times in this short psalm.

See the picture of breaking forth, erupting, spontaneous rejoicing. The word noise (2 times) is positive though not particularly a structured, planned kind of noise. The term translated *noise* speaks of loudness from shouting, singing, or using an instrument. It is best illustrated by a sporting event.

Go to Clemson and be overwhelmed by 83,000 fans shouting to the top of their lungs as the Tiger football team runs down the hill onto the field. Many commentators say it is the most exhilarating 30 seconds in college football.

Now go with me to a conference of 4,000 preachers and Christian workers from all over the world as they raise their voices in praise, singing to God about His salvation. It really is the same emotion, intensity, energy one might experience at a ball game.

But now meet with me in the average church service in America on Sunday. Watch the poor beleaguered worship leader try to get "God's people" to praise Him for His salvation. No energy, no zeal, no noise. It is almost as though people who claim to be God's people think it is wrong to do what these psalms tell us to do. And the target

of our praise is far superior than some sports team. If we really understand God's work in salvation, we really should break out in joy, raising our voices to the God of salvation.

Furthermore, we should use instruments to praise the LORD with melody. *Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody! With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD!* (vv.5-6). It is good to make a joyful noise with instruments. It is right to do it for the King, the LORD.

We are encouraged to join all creation in declaring the glory of the coming Judge (vv.7-9). In this section of the psalm, creation personified (vv.7-8). *Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it! Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together before the LORD* (vv.7-9a). The inanimate elements of creation rejoice in the presence of the LORD. Notice that their music also is directed to the LORD. Creation is a challenge to us. Therefore, the call goes out to people everywhere who ought to respond like seas, rivers, and hills. The call is for *the world and those who dwell in it* (v.7b)! Of course the unbelieving people of the world will not join us. But certainly the recipients of salvation ought to be bubbling over with joy for what God does.

Creation rejoices because its Creator comes to judge (v.9b). *For he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity* (v.9b). This statement might feel almost like a bucket of cold water dumped on you. If you fell that way, you might want to check your salvation. When the LORD comes as judge at the end of time, He will set every single thing about His creation right. Once again the LORD's righteousness will be the standard. All political correctness, all vain philosophies, all foolishness of human wisdom will be judged by God's truth. That is a cause for rejoicing not sorrow.

Because of God's marvelous work of salvation, we have hope. We have hope that more sinners will be saved (especially those we know and love). We have hope that because God loves according to His covenants and promises, we who are saved will live forever with Him. We have hope that all the injustices, lies, wickedness, and sin we see in this world will be exposed and sentenced to eternal

punishment. And so we cannot help but rejoice, we must raise a song of joy and gladness to God.