

## Glorifying God in the Church by Evangelism and Missions – Psalm 96

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Last week we saw from Ephesians 4:11-12 that the role of pastors and teachers is to equip believers to do the work of ministry. That is our desire when we come together as a church, the focus is not unbelievers, it's believers being trained so they are not spectators but active members in building God's church. The focus of our church worship service is not:

- entertaining the saints, it's equipping the saints
- not educating the saints only, knowledge without action
- evangelizing unbelievers in the service by doing whatever we can to make them comfortable and coming back by us weakening and watering down Sunday morning, make that service really for outsiders and unsaved, and then try and have another small group where believers can try to be fed

Many well-intentioned ministries have it backwards or upside-down of Ephesians 4, which teaches we are to gather as a church primarily to equip the believers, feed them meat so they can grow, not just milk. We exhort and admonish them (Col 1:28) to follow Christ more, then you are to go out and do the work of evangelism and ministry. We gather here so you can scatter to our world and community with the gospel message and truths you learn here.

Ephesians 4:12 says *your* role is to be a minister, not only serving one another, but an important part of your ministry is to be a fisher of men as Jesus told His disciples when He first called them.

As much as equipping believers and building up the body is the focus of pastoral ministry or the focus of the church service as we saw last time, it's equally important that we don't neglect the important place of evangelism outside these walls and even outside this country, and that's what I hope God will help us see today. If you have grown apathetic or indifferent to the world around you, if you lack a passion for the lost to see God's glory, I know of no better place than Psalm 96 to stir up God-centered praise and proclamation of His gospel to all people's for God's glorification.

<sup>1</sup> Oh, sing to the LORD a new song! Sing to the LORD, all the earth. <sup>2</sup> Sing to the LORD, bless His name; Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. <sup>3</sup> Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples. <sup>4</sup> For the LORD *is* great and greatly to be praised; He *is* to be feared above all gods. <sup>5</sup> For all the gods of the peoples *are* idols, But the LORD made the heavens. <sup>6</sup> Honor and majesty *are* before Him; Strength and beauty *are* in His sanctuary. <sup>7</sup> Give to the LORD, O families of the peoples, Give to the LORD glory and strength. <sup>8</sup> Give to the LORD the glory *due* His name; Bring an offering, and come into His courts. <sup>9</sup> Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth. <sup>10</sup> Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns; The world also is firmly established, It shall not be moved; He shall judge the peoples righteously." <sup>11</sup> Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; Let the sea roar, and all its fullness; <sup>12</sup> Let the field be joyful, and all that *is* in it. Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice before the LORD. <sup>13</sup> For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, And the peoples with His truth.

Psalm 96 contains three intensifying and widening calls to the praise of the LORD, the only true God. We have been calling this series of studies on Sundays our series on the *church*, but it's really a series on GOD. We are studying how we can glorify God in the various mandates He has given to us as believers in His church.

Evangelism is an important message in this psalm but the worship of God is actually its higher message. It's worship of God that should drive evangelism (v. 1 and following). It should fuel our evangelism. Higher than all is God's glory, which is ultimately the chief end and aim of evangelism and missions (v. 3, 7-8, etc.)

According to 1 Chronicles 16, the historical background of the words of this song where the occasion the ark of the covenant was brought into Jerusalem under King David, the ark which was the place the glory of God and presence of God dwelt. It was a time of great rejoicing and praise to God, but the psalm looks beyond the worship in Israel's walls and calls for God to be glorified throughout the earth and even the earth itself to be a part of that. It not only looks back to King David's reign, the psalm looks forward to the ultimate reign of the final Son of David, the Coming King and His Coming Kingdom where the Messiah will rule the earth and will judge the nations when He comes again.

This psalm can be structured or divided into three parts. Each part of our outline is signaled by a command or call that is repeated 3x:

“Sing to the Lord” 3x in v. 1-2

“Give to the Lord” 3x in v. 7-8 (or “ascribe to the Lord”)

“Let the” 3x in v. 11 (heavens, earth, and sea be glad and rejoice)

***God Must Be Glorified in Evangelism and Missions By:***

**1. The Gospel's Proclamation – v. 1-6**

**v. 1 Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! Sing to the Lord, all the earth.**

3x in the first two verses we are commanded to “sing to the Lord”

The 3 commands to sing are followed by 3 more commands in verse 2 and 3: “bless ... proclaim ... declare” – in the Hebrew the intensity is highlighted by a rhyming sound with these words in the original language: *bar-e-khu ... bashsh-e-ru ... sapp-e-ru*

It would be like in English saying:

TELL of the Lord's name

SPELL out the blessings of His gospel

YELL out to all of the glory of God

A heart that doesn't sing does not have a musical problem, it has a spiritual problem.

**2 Sing to the Lord, bless His name; Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day.**

This verse moves from praise to proclamation of the gospel. The good news of God's salvation we are to proclaim to others from day to day, implying evangelism is to be an everyday natural part of our life, “day to day.” And this evangelism is properly fueled first by a heart that sings to the Lord in true worship and wants to bless His name, as the first part of verse 2 says. We bless His name when we tell of His name and His good news to others. We are not satisfied to bless His name by ourselves, we are not content to worship God as individuals only, we want to let others know this good news so they can sing about it as well and worship with us.

In the book *Psalms of the Heart*, the relation of singing to the gospel going forth was illustrated well in the experience of two Moody Bible Institute graduates John and Elaine Beekman in ministering to the Chol Indians of Southern Mexico:

‘when the missionaries came, the Chol Indians did not know how to sing. They had no singing music. With the coming of the gospel, however, the believers of the tribe began to love to sing because they now have something to sing about. We of all people should be the most singing people on the place of the earth ... We have something to sing about. This [psalm] begins in praise, leads to worship, and flows out in proclamation.’<sup>1</sup>

Verse 2 makes clear that praising God without proclaiming God to others is not complete. Someone who sings to the Lord in true worship is not content to sing a solo, but he wants to have other voices added to the choir, so he proclaims the good tidings of salvation.

If you have a heart that truly sings about and loves the Lord, the natural extension is you will also share God’s love and good news with others if you deeply love Him. Perhaps a better measure of our praise and true love of the Lord is not how we speak of Him in the comfortable confines of the church, but how we speak of the Lord outside these walls. It’s only natural to talk about someone you love, in fact it’s hard not to talk about who or what you love.

Have you talked about the Lord to an unbeliever in recent days? Weeks? Months? Do you at least desire to, try to? Is there an unbeliever you’re praying for? Do you try to take advantage of opportunities to share, even a little? Are you consciously thinking of ways to try and bring up things of the Lord to unbelievers?

When someone asks you how your weekend was and what you did, you don’t have to say “not much.” Why not tell them about your church and what you learned and how much you love God’s people and God’s truth and how it’s the highlight of your week (if it is)?

Next week is a great week to invite coworkers or family members to church. What does it hurt just to say, “Hey, if you aren’t already going somewhere for an Easter Sunday service, I would love to have you come to church with me? I could pick you up ...”

I’ve seen some estimates of about 70% of people who visit a church do so because they’re invited, and a good number of friends and co-workers will come when personally invited by someone they know. People are far more likely to come when invited. We can’t just sit here and hope some unbeliever will be surfing the web and stumble across our church website and decide in their unregenerate heart to give us a try. Not too likely a scenario. We don’t just throw tracts by the road and hope someone picks one up.

The evangelism called for here in verse 2 seems to be the everyday active life witness we are to have and notice it is not just the way we live – we are also to proclaim this salvation with our mouths. This word “good news” in v. 2 is the same word in Greek for the gospel of the New Testament. Proclaiming God’s good news, the gospel, is a command, not a suggestion. This word “proclaim” is the same word translated “herald of good tidings” in Isaiah 40:9. This word “proclaim” referred to the duty of a herald who walks ahead of the victorious king and announces the report of victory.

### **3 Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples.**

God's salvation is not only to go forth in our neighborhoods, God's glory is to be declared among the nations.

God's purposes are much bigger than what's going on in a local congregation and it's much bigger than our American nation. Our worship should overflow to our desire for worship in all nations. Worship, as I've said before, is the fuel of missions and is also the goal of missions.

The highest motive for evangelism and missions is not guilt, it's the glory of God, as v. 3 says. It's a God-centered, God-produced, God-exalting passion in our hearts for God to be glorified and made known in a lost and dying world.

Do you have that desire? Or are you apathetic to the rest of the world? Are you in a Christian cocoon, ignoring a perishing world around you every day of people who so desperately need the Lord?

This sermon is not going to give you a detailed script for how to evangelize others (bottom of note sheet has a couple resources to help with methods, [Metzger's book](#), and others) but this psalm focuses more on the motivation that should drive our desire for our world, like the title of the first book, the Supremacy of God.

Verse 3 has been called the Great Commission of the Old Testament. There are nations of people who need to hear, millions of unreached peoples who have not heard of the glory of the Lord, this should motivate us and drive us with missionary passion and prayers for the good news to go forth among all the peoples!

Verse 1 began in the assembly of believers praising God.

Verse 2 moved to gospel's proclamation day by day around us.

Then verse 3 goes beyond this responsibility we have in our everyday life to evangelize and it is expanded from our community and our spheres of influence here to the nations, and to all the peoples. Every people group, tribe, tongue, race, and culture in the whole world must know of the glory and supremacy of our God.

One pastor I read tells how in one church service in Illinois, 'the song leader stood up before the congregation and said to them, "Turn to page 654 in your hymnals. We'll sing till the whole world knows." What he meant was that we'll sing the hymn called "Till the Whole World Knows." He didn't hear a young girl in the back say to her father, "I think we're going to be here a long time." There's more theological truth in that statement than the little girl knew. We'll sing until the whole world knows! And ... we'll sing to all eternity of the glory of our King. Proclamation follows praise and worship.'<sup>2</sup>

### **4 For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods.**

The ultimate motive behind evangelism here and abroad is the glory of God through the worship

of God.

We are to proclaim His glory and His good news in our nation and to all the nations so that worshippers will be added to the great choir of men and women who fear and greatly praise the matchless mighty magnificent majestic Lord who is infinitely Supreme over all so-called gods of this world, which the next verse makes clear are no gods at all.

### **5 For all the gods of the peoples are idols, But the Lord made the heavens.**

Those stone idols and statues that the pagans bow before, they can't see or speak or eat or hear – they can't do anything – but the true and Living Lord made the universe out of nothing by His mere word, without breaking a sweat.

There's a satire or sarcastic play on words in the Hebrew text of v. 5 – the supposed *Elohim* of the pagans are really *elilim* – the word translated “idol” literally means “no-thing” or “nothing” or a “non-entity.” Isaiah also mocked these “no gods” or so-called gods of pagans by showing the impotence and inability of their idols to do anything, and Isaiah said to that these idols in reality are not only nothing but “less than nothing ... utterly worthless” (Isaiah 41:24).

1 Corinthians 8:4 (NKJV) “we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one.”

NASB “there is no such thing”

ESV says ‘we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.”’

A hymn of Isaac Watts reads: *Before Jehovah's awesome throne, Ye nations, bow with sacred joy. Know that the Lord is God alone; He can create; and He can destroy.*

### **6 Honor and majesty are before Him; Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.**

This is a message about God. It's not a message about man. It's a God-centered message through and through.

*God Must Be Glorified in Evangelism and Missions By:*

1. The Gospel's Proclamation – v. 1-6
2. **Worship from All Nations – v. 7-10**

### **7 Give to the Lord, O families of the peoples, Give to the Lord glory and strength.**

“Give” repeated 3x in v. 7-8 (“Ascribe” in the NASB). Anytime something is repeated twice by a Bible writer indicates great emphasis, to repeat a command 3x is the highest and most emphatic of their language. The psalm began with “sing to the Lord” 3x and now it has “give to the Lord” 3x – there is a crescendo of universal praise to God, an intensifying and widening call not just in the commands but in the expanding audiences.

### **8 Give to the Lord the glory due His name; Bring an offering, and come into His courts.**

James Boice points out “In this stanza the worship of God is described as our bringing something to God rather than our coming to God to get something from him. We usually think of it the other way around. We think of coming to church to receive ... But here worship is chiefly our bringing

praise and offering to God ... to *give* rather than to *get*.”<sup>3</sup>

We come into God’s courts, we should come into His church to *give* rather than to *get*. It’s about His glory not our good.

In ancient times, it was customary in the Orient for gifts to be brought by all who would be admitted to the presence of a king (ex: Magi from East at birth of Christ).

In this psalm, an important part of our worship in the assembly is our offering, our giving to Him. I hope you see your financial offerings to the church as worship, not just a duty, and that it is from the heart. Of course, we are also to give of our entire lives – we don’t do animal sacrifices anymore, but Romans 12 says we are to be living sacrifices, our life entirely given to Him to do as He wills. Not everyone is called to give their life to foreign fields, but we can all give to missions and pray earnestly for missions. And let’s not neglect the mission field right in our community here.

### **9 Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth.**

An alternate translation is “worship the Lord in holy splendor” or “in the *attire* of holiness”

All the earth is called to fear and tremble before the holiness of God. All the peoples who were divided in languages at the Tower of Babel, when they repent and trust the Lord they will be brought back together and will one day all be represented before the Throne of the Lamb in united voice glorifying the Lord (Rev. 4-5).

‘*tremble* ... expresses the profoundest awe, just as “worship” is more accurately translated as *bow down*. It was the sight of the King in all His beauty that made John in Patmos fall at His feet as dead [and Isaiah at God’s holiness ....., etc.]. Do we worship Him with the same prostrate awe and sacred fear? *Fear before Him* can be more literally translated, “Let all the earth be moved before His face.”’<sup>4</sup>

Lawson writes: ‘When approaching such blazing holiness, people should tremble before him in reverential awe. Worshipping God is never a casual experience but [should be] soul-gripping, even traumatic.’<sup>5</sup>

### **10 Say among the nations, “The Lord reigns; The world also is firmly established, It shall not be moved; He shall judge the peoples righteously.”**

This is a key verse of the psalm and the key phrase in this portion of the book of Psalms: THE LORD REIGNS. He is the King who rules with Sovereign Power in absolute control.

“The Lord reigns” – see Ps 93:1, 97:1, 99:1, etc.

This is to be proclaimed not just among the congregation but among the nations

In Psalm 96:10, to say “the world is firmly established, it shall not be moved” is to say “there is no need for anxiety. God is in control of the earth – it is stable and reliable. He reigns in

sovereign control of all.”

When the verse says “He shall judge the people righteously” this is to be a comfort to us in this world that is so unrighteous and unfair and where justice does not always take place – the Lord one day will bring justice and fairness with complete integrity. No capricious or arbitrary decisions. He will set everything right. (Barrick)

History tells us that when Julian reigned over the Roman Empire in A.D. 361, he ‘renounced Christianity ... and devoted a brief but energetic reign of two years to the attempted restoration of paganism. He sought to put a new spirit of philosophy into the old forms, and, without returning to sanguinary persecution he used measures of restriction which were more dangerous. The Church historians of that period tell us that the psalm commonly sung by the Christians during the reign of Julian was the 96<sup>th</sup>. Read in this light, it becomes singularly appropriate.’ [“The Lord reigns ... all the gods of the nations are idols”]<sup>6</sup>

As the old hymn says:

*Jesus shall reign wher'er the sun doth its successive journeys run  
His Kingdom stretch from shore to shore, till moons shall wax and wane no more*

I would guess that most books you read on missions or evangelism wouldn't emphasize that we should proclaim “the Lord reigns” as the centerpiece of our message, but this is the central message of this psalm which commands us to declare this to all the nations.

Modern evangelism tends NOT to emphasize the ruling reign of our Lord, its emphasis is more on a relationship He wants. “The Lord reigns” is not a central message in modern evangelism, usually their central message is that Jesus *loves*, but the truth that He is Lord and reigning as King and Creator and owner of your life too often gets neglected in the process. Of course, the Bible does say God is loving and He is revealed as a Savior, but He is also revealed as Sovereign and Judge here, the Lord who reigns.

The book of Acts is the only book we have recorded of actual evangelism done by the church in the N.T. and it's very much consistent with these truths of the Lordship and reign of Christ and His return as Judge. In fact, the declaration “Jesus is Lord” is the fundamental Christian message of the N.T.

That's why it's so troubling when people teach we should present Jesus as *Savior* to unbelievers, but He doesn't need to be received as Lord. When you compare that idea to the actual Christian evangelism in the book of Acts, the emphasis is much different:

- The word “Savior” appears 2x in the book of Acts
- The word “Lord” appears 107x in the book of Acts

The words “love” and “mercy” don't even appear in the book of Acts, although the word “grace” does occur a few times in regards to believers speaking to other believers. The dominant note in all the evangelism done by these N.T. Christians in Acts is the word “Lord” – their message was always based on the Resurrected Christ's Lordship and the need for all men to repent.

In Acts 17, Paul speaks to the pagan Greeks this way:

“The God who made the world and all things in it ... He is Lord of heaven and earth ...” (v. 24)  
Verse 30-31: “... God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

*God Must Be Glorified in Evangelism and Missions By:*

1. The Gospel’s Proclamation – v. 1-6
2. Worship from All Nations – v. 7-10
3. **Joy in All of Creation – v. 11-13**

There’s a movement in each of the 3 outward as well.

#1 – All Believers

#2 – To All Unbelievers

#3 – Includes All Creatures

One writer has said well that “worship is both the fuel that fires the boiler and the goal toward which missions move. It comes out of worship, it proclaims the gospel, and it leads back to worship. The deepest reason why our passion for God should fuel missions is the overflow of our delight in God because missions is the overflow of God’s delight in being God ... All of us and all of the created order are to worship God.”<sup>7</sup>

**11 Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; Let the sea roar, and all its fullness;  
12 Let the field be joyful, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice before the Lord.**

The last word for “rejoice” or “sing for joy” has the concept of a ringing shout of joy, exultation, and victory. It reminds me of the verse that says even the trees of the field will clap their hands. It reminds me of when Jesus said on Palm Sunday (today by the way) that if the Pharisees kept the people from praising him even the very rocks would cry out. It reminds me of Romans 8 which talks about how all of creation has been under the curse and longing for its deliverance. It’s a powerful and poetic way to portray how all of creation will rejoice when the fullness of the gospel and Christ’s future kingdom on earth will restore creation to its original existence in the garden of Eden, paradise lost to paradise restored.

Notice the next verse connects this with the coming of the Lord. Traditionally, this psalm was sung or recited on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day – looking at the first and second advents of Christ. This same thought is also conveyed by Psalm 98, which inspired Isaac Watts to write “Joy to the World.”

Gladness and glorifying or praising God go together.

Psalm 67:2 That Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations.<sup>3</sup> Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You.<sup>4</sup> Let the nations be glad and sing for joy; For You will judge the peoples with uprightness And guide the nations on the earth.Selah.<sup>5</sup> Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You.<sup>6</sup> The earth has yielded its produce; God, our God, blesses us.<sup>7</sup> God blesses us, That all the ends



of the earth may fear Him.

It was a great joy this year to us this year as the leadership board of this church voted to increase our monthly giving budget to missions by about 37%, not only approving raising support to our missionaries as recommended by our missions committee, but even adding to the list. Most of us will not go to the nations but we can support missionaries in bringing the glorious gospel to them.

You all know we don't have unlimited finances here, we have to trust God for His provision and this is a step of faith that all of our leaders were excited about – as we make missions a priority not just in what we say but also in our budget, we believe God will bless that intention and desire we have to support His servants who have been laboring for His name overseas while under-supported.

Time is short – people need the Lord, here and around the globe.

**13 For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, And the peoples with His truth.**

Note the repetition for emphasis “He is coming” – He is surely coming. The last verse of this psalm sounds like the last verse of the whole Bible.

Revelation 22:20 (NKJV) *He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming quickly.” Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*

All of creation will rejoice on that day, except for those who are not ready to meet the Lord.

Are you ready to meet your Maker and Judge if you died today? If not, you have much to fear.

A. W. Tozer asked the question:

What is your concept of Jesus Christ, my brother? If the "ten-cent-store Jesus" that is being preached by a lot of men, the plastic, painted Christ who has no spine and no justice and is pictured as the soft and pliable friend to everybody—if He is the only Christ there is, then we might as well close our books and bar our doors, and make a bakery or garage out of this church! But that Christ that is being preached and pictured is not the Christ of God, nor the Christ of the Bible, nor the Christ we must deal with.

The Christ we must deal with has eyes as a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished brass, and out of His mouth comes a sharp, two-edged sword ... This is one of the neglected Bible doctrines of our day—that Jesus Christ is the judge of mankind.<sup>8</sup>

He comes to judge all who have not bowed to His Lordship. If you have not done that yet in your life, it's urgent you commit your life today to follow Jesus as your Lord and trust in Him alone.

Repent and turn from your sins to follow Christ.

Trust in Him and Him alone, and you can be a part of that joyful celebration that day and for all

eternity in God's presence in heaven.

Steve Lawson summarized this psalm this way:

'Let this message – "the Lord reigns" – be declared far and wide to all nations and peoples. God is enthroned in the heavens and reigns over all the earth. There is only one Sovereign, God Himself. May this God-exalting truth be proclaimed to all the earth. God alone is seated on high, and his government rules over all. This theme of his universal reign should promote a missionary zeal throughout the earth. There is no conflict between divine sovereignty and worldwide missions. [God's sovereign saving grace and power actually fuels evangelism when understood properly]. Both Scripture and church history substantiate this fact. This psalm demands that all believers participate in global evangelism in one way or another, whether by going, praying, supporting, or training. It is incumbent upon the church to take this message of God's supremacy into all the earth and say to them, "The Lord reigns!" Let God's people say to the world, "Come bow down before God in repentance and faith in His Son!"' (Lawson, *Psalms*, Vol. 2, p. 118-19)

As you leave the doors of this church to go out into the world, I want you to imagine there is a sign above the exit door that says

### YOU ARE NOW ENTERING THE MISSION FIELD

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<sup>1</sup> Steve Haines, "Psalm 96: Praise to Proclamation!" In *Reclaiming the Gospel and Reforming Churches*, Tom Ascol, ed., Founders Press, p. 164-65.

<sup>2</sup> Haines, p. 168.

<sup>3</sup> James M. Boice, *Psalms*, 2:787

<sup>4</sup> Herbert Lockyer, *A Devotional Commentary on the Psalms*, 349.

<sup>5</sup> Steve Lawson, *Psalms*, Vol. 2, p. 118.

<sup>6</sup> John Ker, *The Psalms in History and Biography*, p. 124-25.

<sup>7</sup> Haines, p. 162-63.

<sup>8</sup> *The Tozer Pulpit*, Volume 1, Book 1, p. 96-97.