

Introduction: Psalm 96 summons worldwide worship. What is required is that all creatures and all creation are to worshipfully praise the Lord.

Today, the church is suffering from an identity crisis about the Sunday assembly. Is the primary function the worship of God by His people? Or is the chief purpose an evangelistic outreach to unbelievers? Or is the choreographed presentation a recruiting campaign for more adherents? What is the major focus of the worship service? Who or what is the chief end? Is it God or man or business or entertainment? Is the assembly to be God-centered or seeker-sensitive? Is the service to exalt God or to satisfy human needs?

Churches that are influenced by church growth methodology have lost the perspective of the transcendent Almighty, and the exaltation of the Holy One. They have designed the presentation to make it attractive to anyone curious.

Churches that are submissive to the Word of God benefit greatly from Psalm 96. They anticipate worldwide worship.

1. Context of Psalm 96

With its appeal for “all the earth” to honor the Lord, Psalm 96 identifies itself as one of a series of six liturgical hymns (Psa. 95-100) stressing the Creator’s royal majesty.

If we compare Psalm 96 with Psalm 95, we notice that whereas Psalm 95 was directed to the covenant community, Psalm 96 was written for the global inhabitants.

Edmund Clowney notes: “Israel is not given the task of calling the nations to a better worship of the gods. Israel is given the task of calling the nations to the worship of a better God, that is, to worship the only, true, living God.”

The occasion of Psalm 96 is recorded in 1 Chronicles 16:7, “On that day David first delivered *this psalm* into the hand of Asaph and his brethren, to thank the LORD:”

David desired to make Jerusalem also the religious capital. It was not long, therefore, before he sought to bring the Ark, which had been at Kirjath-jearim for seventy years, to the city (2 Sam. 6:1-11; 1 Chr. 13). However, David did not transport it correctly, using an open cart rather than poles as prescribed by God. As a result, one of the attendants, Uzzah, son of Abinadab in whose house the Ark had resided, was struck dead when he attempted to keep it from falling from the cart. David then left the Ark at the nearby home of Obed-Edom, whose household was greatly blessed by God as a result. Three months later David returned to finish the task, this time proceeding according to divine direction (2 Sam.6:12-23; 1 Chr. 15:1-29). He placed the Ark in a tent which he had prepared in Jerusalem amidst great rejoicing and offering of sacrifices.

There must have been many joyful moments in the lifetime of King David, but to judge from the narratives the brightest of all must have been when the Ark of God was brought to Jerusalem from its temporary resting place in the house of Obed-Edom. Thousands of people were assembled, led by hundreds of priests. There were choirs and an orchestra. And when the priests set out with the Ark their steps were heralded by the sounding of rams’ horns and trumpets, the clash of cymbals, and the plucking of lyres and harps. David was so delighted that he threw decorum aside and danced among the people before the Lord. He also composed a psalm for the occasion, the words of which may be found in 1 Chronicles 16. It

was a fairly long psalm, but what is important here is that the middle verses of the psalm (1 Chr. 16:23-33) also appears as Psalm 96. Other portions of Psalm 105:1-15 and 106:1, 47, 48 are before and after Psalm 96.

2. Outline of Psalm 96

Worldwide worship is exuberant (vs. 1-3), exclusive (vs. 4-6), expressive (vs. 7-10), and ecstatic (vs. 11-13). Four attributes of God are expressed: God the Savior, Creator, Sustainer, and Judge.

A. EXUBERANT WORSHIP (96:1-3) -- God the Savior

1. Exhortation for His praise (96:1-2a)

- a. Sing to the LORD a new song! (96:1a)

The call to sing a new song is a call to sing about some new thing God has Himself done. The new thing was God's coming to Jerusalem by the symbolism of the moving of the Ark. It was expected that He would now also rule over His people as well as the gentile nations from Mount Zion.

W Robert Godfrey states that the phrase "old song" does not appear in the Psalter, but is the proper contrast to the "new song" spoken of in six psalms (33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1). In the context of these six psalms, it is clear that the "new song" is not a reference to the creativity of the psalmist in writing a novel expression of praise. Rather, it is a reference to the songs that celebrate the redemptive work of God. These new songs of redemption stand in contrast to the old songs of creation.

The book of Revelation confirms this distinction. In Revelation 4:11, the twenty-four elders sing a song of praise to God for his creation: "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created." In Revelation 5:9, these elders sing a song of praise to Christ for His redemptive work, a song called "a new song": "And they sang a new song, saying: You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation." The new song of redemption comes to supplement the old song of creation.

Each new act of God in the history of redemption is a new occasion for praise. The "new song" is new in the sense that it celebrates a *new* act of God's redemption.

- b. Sing to the LORD all the earth (96:1b)
- c. Sing to the LORD bless His name (96:2a)

The name that we declare among the nations is the name of God the Father who gave His Son. It is the name of the Son of God who gave His life. It is the name of the Spirit of God who comes to proclaim to the world the rich wonders of Calvary's cross.

2. Proclamation for all peoples (96:2b-3)

- a. Proclaim His salvation (96:2b) -- God's sovereignty

The salvation of the Lord is a continuous deliverance. Paul writes in Philippians 1:6, "being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete

it until the day of Jesus Christ.” We were saved in the past by the Son from the pollution of sin. We are being saved in the present by the Holy Spirit from the power of sin. We will be saved in the future by the Father from the presence of sin. In 2 Corinthians 1:10 Paul uses the three tenses of salvation – “who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us.”

- b. Declare His glory (96:3a) -- God’s superiority
- c. [Declare] His wonders (96:3b) -- God’s superlatives

The declaration of God’s glory among the nations follows upon praising Him. The psalm teaches that worship should never be merely a private thing, something between ourselves and God only, but should also be that which leads to a missionary witness. We should never be satisfied to worship God privately.

B. EXCLUSIVE WORSHIP (96:4-6) -- God the Creator

1. Greatness of the LORD (96:4)

He is no petty deity, presiding, as the heathen imagine their gods to do, over some one nation, or one department of nature.

2. Grossness of the idols (96:5)

There is a play on words in this stanza. The word for “gods” is *elohim*, and the word for “idol” is *elilim*. So what the writer is saying is that the *elohim* of the gentiles are *elilim*. In Hebrew the word “idol” means “a no-thing,” that is, a non-entity or nothing [“nobodies”].

Christianity is an exclusive faith. It is not only wrong but also a sin to worship any other. If you are not worshipping the God of the Bible exclusively, as God says you must do, you are not worshipping God.

Baal was the Canaanites principle god; Ashtoreth, Baal’s wife, their principal goddess. She was the personification of the reproductive principle in nature. Ishtar was her Babylonian name; Astarte her Greek and Roman name. Temples of Baal and Ashtoreth were usually together. Priestesses were temple prostitutes. Sodomites were male temple prostitutes. The worship of Baal, Ashtoreth, and other Canaanite gods consisted in the most extravagant orgies; their temples were centers of vice. Prophets of Baal and Ashtoreth were official murderers of little children.

3. Glories of the LORD (96:6) -- all that is glorious is found in the LORD

If we ask whether this *sanctuary* is earthly or heavenly, the probable answer is both. The earthly one was a “copy and shadow” of the heavenly (Heb. 8:5); but its outward *strength and beauty* (Exo. 28:2; 31:3ff.) were to be outshone by the inward glory of Christ, the true earthly sanctuary (John 1:14; 2:21).

C. EXPRESSIVE WORSHIP (96:7-10) -- God the Sustainer

1. Ascriptions of praise (96:7-8a)

- a. Give to the LORD O kindreds of the peoples (96:7a) -- all people
- b. Give to the LORD glory and strength (96:7b) -- all intensity

- c. Give to the LORD the glory due His name (96:8a) -- all adoration

Here is a call to repent of religious pluralism and religious neutrality. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution begins by prohibiting the government from making laws respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise of religion. This is understood as the freedom of all religions. Joe Morecraft III states: "In this country you have the legal protection of the government to worship the God of your choice. As long as America believes that it has no future. Neither the Republicans nor the Democrats, nor anybody else can save themselves from the consequences of their idolatry. The LORD God requires all people with all intensity to give Him all adoration. Worship this God alone."

2. Actions of praise (96:8b-9)

- a. Bring an offering and come into His courts (96:8b) -- living sacrifice
- b. Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness (96:9a) -- transformed
- c. Tremble before Him, all the earth (96:9b) -- reverence

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 coming to church to receive either knowledge through the teaching, or specific gifts from God as His answers to our prayers. But here worship is chiefly our bringing praise and offerings to God. "We go into God's courts to give rather than to get" (Perowne).

Today, worship services have become very casual. Everything is upbeat and superficial. They promote an atmosphere that is inviting and friendly. The goal is that anyone who visits is comfortable with what is seen and heard. Everyone is to have a good time. This world knows little about coming to church and trembling before the face of God.

3. Attributes of praise (96:10)

- a. The LORD reigns
- b. The LORD sustains
- c. The LORD discerns

The focus of the gospel is the sovereignty of God and His grace. God does whatever He pleases. God's grace is so sovereign that He saves all whom He wills. Does the God many American Christians serve look like the God of Psalm 96? Do they think of a God in splendor and majesty, strength and beauty?

D. ECSTATIC WORSHIP (96:11-13) -- God the Judge

1. Animation of creation (96:11-12)

- a. From the heavens and earth
- b. From the sea [and land]
- c. From the field and forest

Isaiah illustrates this personification of nature. Isaiah 44:23 exhorts, "Sing, O heavens, for the LORD has done *it!* Shout, you lower parts of the earth; Break forth into singing, you mountains, O forest, and every tree in it! For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, And glorified

Himself in Israel.” Isaiah 49:13 exhorts, “Sing, O heavens! Be joyful, O earth! And break out in singing, O mountains! For the LORD has comforted His people, And will have mercy on His afflicted.”

2. Anticipation of judgment (96:13)

The repetition, “for He cometh,” expresses the *certainty* of His coming, and His people’s *joyful anticipation* of it.

We associate the thoughts of God’s judgment with all manner of dread expectations. In the days of the Old Testament this judgment was also thought of with most joyful anticipation, for judgment involved the fact that all things that are now in disarray and disharmony, suffering from injustice and violence, shall be set right and adjusted. That positive and constructive side of God’s judgment was the broader aspect of the truth that the Old Testament saints believed and enjoyed. How near at hand this great day may be is immaterial. The mere fact that it will come to pass is what matters. Each time that thought arises, there is occasion for gratitude to God, for all created things are involved in that great divine restoration, and all should, therefore, contribute their portion of the vast chorus of praise that should continually rise to heavens because of this great prospect.

Conclusion: RPCNA Testimony, Ch. 21, Art. 1. “All people are required to worship the true God, in a scriptural manner, with sincerity of heart. Sincerity cannot make unscriptural worship acceptable to God. Proper worship is to be conducted in an orderly manner. The tendency to emphasize ritual, liturgy and ceremony is contrary to the Scriptures.”

At the time of the Ark’s procession to the tent in Jerusalem, the nations lay under the domination of Satan. Their deception, superstition, and abomination were pervasive and oppressive. Only one people was left in all the world with whom the Most Holy was dealing and to whom He was revealing -- the covenant nation of Israel. This people, known for their stumbling and complaining, their inconsistent and too often wicked leaders (false prophets, corrupt priests, and evil kings) -- this people were the missionaries of the Most High to confess His wonders among all peoples, to give His tribute in worship, and to expect His present reign in symbols to proceed to His universal dominion in history over all people.

Their fervent expectation was that all people would heed the summons (not an optional invitation, no mere RSVP) -- not to make them financially solvent, nor internationally respected, nor theologically exonerated -- but to worship the one, only, true, and living God, this well known Lord, to whom they now sing.

Now, however stumbling we are and however distracted the church is, now with redemption accomplished at Passover and reconciliation applied at Pentecost, we too have every expectation for a joyful response swelling in number and volume. Since the Evil-one is chained and the Holy Spirit is poured out, all praise is breaking forth in adoration of the Lord and King.

William Plumer observed: “If a redeemed sinner should keep silent on redemption he would be a monster.”

Psalm 96 is a missionary psalm for all ages. It is the Great Commission in Old Testament language. We are on a global mission.

Worship leads to evangelism and evangelism leads to worship. Understand the revelation of God as Savior, Creator, Sustainer, and Judge. Respond to the exhortations to worship the LORD as He has revealed Himself with joyful praise and reverent trembling. Live for His worldwide worship.

Prayer: O good Lord, Who wills that all people would be saved and to come to the knowledge of Thy truth; Show Thy power and excellent Majesty unto the whole world, that every one may sing Thy praises, yea, and show forth Thy salvation, which You have promised to all them that dedicate themselves to Thy service; that You may be praised in all Thy works, through Jesus Christ Thy Son. Amen.