

November 16, 2025

A CALL FOR ALL PEOPLES TO PRAISE THE LORD

Psalm 96

(3 of 4 in a series of selected Psalms)

We have made it our quest around here to preach through the entire canon of Scripture repeatedly. We're now on our second go of it. We first preached through the canon, having covered each book of the Bible at some level of altitude (sometimes a few chapters at a time and at others a few verses at a time) around 2014. And since then, we've been on our second journey through the canon. And so far, I've found the Psalter to be the hardest book to tackle—for multiple reasons. The main reason is simply that there are 150 psalms. That's about eighty-five more chapters than the second longest book, which is Isaiah. But unlike Isaiah, the psalms feel more random. There's no narrative to follow throughout. Therefore, you end up having to figure out a way to preach 150 different psalms, only a few of which are tied together. So, you end up figuring out how to preach about 150 sermons to get through this one book. Therefore, each time through the canon, we've chosen to mix in some psalms between other series, even as I'm doing right now, preaching this four-week series titled "Selected Psalms."

The reason it's titled "Selected Psalms" is because I simply select a few psalms that I want to preach, somewhat randomly. Now, the reason I say it's *somewhat* random is because there is one criterion I look for when putting together a series of psalms that I'm going to preach. Many of the psalms are so similar that I don't want to preach two psalms that are nearly identical back-to-back. This is, of course, because I don't want to preach the same sermon back-to-back, but what do you do if the psalms are nearly identical? Therefore, as I select them, the only real question I ask is, "Is this psalm quite similar to the last one?" And if the answer is yes, then I typically just select another psalm to preach. But I've nearly violated that rule in choosing to preach Psalms 95 and 96 back-to-back.

If you look at the two psalms, there are many parallels between them. They begin by beckoning us to sing to the Lord, mention his salvation, mention that he is a great God above all gods, and contain a note of judgment. No doubt there are many other small differences, but there is one key difference that stands out in the psalms and made me willing to take these psalms up back-to-back in this sermon series. And that key difference is who each psalm addresses. Here's what I mean. In Psalm 95, we are the ones addressed in the psalm. What I mean is that the psalm is written to the people of God. David exhorts "us" to sing to the Lord and to make a joyful noise to the rock of "our" salvation. He says, let "us" worship and bow down, for God is "our" God and "we" are his sheep. It's written to us.

But when you get to Psalm 96, you'll notice that we—the people of God—are no longer the ones being addressed. Rather, it is written to all those people *out there*. Those addressees are "all the earth" and the "families of the peoples." This psalm is written to all the peoples on the earth who weren't addressed in Psalm 95. You might think of it as Psalm 95 called the Lord's people to worship him, and Psalm 96 calls everyone else to worship him as well. And this change in who is

being addressed means that the message of this psalm, though similar to the message of Psalm 95, contains a missionary element in it as well. And that missionary element is the main thing that I want to highlight from this psalm this morning. I think that's the main point of the psalm, namely, that all people have a responsibility to worship the Lord.

All the peoples of the earth have a responsibility to worship the Lord

After reading Psalm 95, you might get the idea that Israel knows their God is the one true God, and he is, therefore, greater than all other gods—the “great King above all gods”—and therefore they should worship him, but whether anyone else worships him is neither here nor there for them. They might say, “Let the nations do whatever they want.” But Psalm 96 corrects that, as the Lord comes along and, through the psalmist, commands all the earth to worship him.

The psalm opens with a command to all the earth to worship the Lord as the psalmist writes, “Oh sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth” (v. 1). And again, verse 7 says, “Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.”

But already we have a question arise, which is, “What is meant by *a new song*?” Well, originally much of this psalm is contained in 1 Chronicles 16 where David brings the ark of God to Jerusalem. And once it arrives in Jerusalem, we see that David records a song of thanks, which is contained in 1 Chronicles 16:8-36. And the reason that David records this new song is because God has shown his grace to them in a fresh way. He's delivered the ark to Jerusalem. The thought is most likely, “How can we keep singing merely old songs when God has done a new thing.” In other words, a song celebrating God's goodness in bringing the ark to Jerusalem now needs to be added to the hymnal. Otherwise, it would be insufficient in light of God's gracious work. Therefore, the psalmist could be recognizing the newness of this song that David composed and thus adds that that qualifier of singing a “new” song to the Lord, or it could be his recognition that in light of God's continuing gracious work among the people, new songs of praise continually need to be written.

But, again, the key is that this command to sing to the Lord and ascribe glory and strength to the Lord is commanded of all the earth and all the families of the earth. In other words, every single person born into this world is born with a responsibility to worship the Lord. We'll look other realities this morning, but none of them will make sense without you and I first understanding that every person born into this world is born with a *responsibility* to worship the Lord. And there's no missing throughout the Bible that our God treats us as responsible creatures. If you need evidence that God treats people as responsible creatures, then just look at the descriptions of the punishment of hell. There's nothing about those descriptions that suggests that God is going to say in the end, “Well, I don't know if I'm going to hold them responsible to do what I've commanded.” Absolutely he is. Any honest reading of the Bible reveals that God treats us as responsible creatures, and all of us are born into this world with a responsibility to worship the Lord.

But I also want to recognize another reality about this psalm. Though it is addressed to all the earth and the “families of the peoples,” those who would have read this psalm would have been the people of God. In other words, it would have been those to whom Psalm 95 was addressed who would have read Psalm 96. Why point that out? Well, because it reminds us of the missionary task that belongs to the people of God. In other words, if we know that all peoples are responsible to worship God, but they’ve never heard the gospel message that is necessary to turn their hearts from love of darkness to love of the light, then it is incumbent on us to take this message to them.

There’s something interesting that happens at the end of Luke’s gospel. You’ll most likely remember it. Jesus has risen, and he’s appeared to two men on the road to Emmaus, who don’t realize they’re talking to the resurrected Christ. And Jesus begins to unveil the Scriptures to them, and Luke tells us that Jesus said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46-47). And if you were to ask, “Where exactly in the Old Testament is it declared that this gospel message should be proclaimed to all nations,” I think Psalm 96 is one answer. It is a psalm written to the nations, telling them they should worship the Lord, and it is a psalm that would have been read by the Lord’s people. The implication seems to be that the Lord’s people must take this message to the nations.

John Piper opens his book on missions writing, “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t.”¹ He’s exactly right. Every person born into this world is responsible to worship the Lord, but they don’t do it. And they won’t do it unless we go declare his good news to the nations. Therefore, I want to highlight from this psalm three reasons why we must take God’s Word to those who do not now worship him. And the first is because there is only one true God who is due their praise.

There is only one true God, and he is due the praise of all peoples

This reality that God is due our praise because he is the one true God was a dominant theme in Psalm 95, and it is with Psalm 96 as well. After telling the reader to declare God’s glory among the nations and his marvelous works among all the peoples in verse 3, the psalmist begins to describe *why* this needs to happen in verses 4-6. We can see that because verse 4 begins with “for” or because. And here’s what he writes: “For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. 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.”

All people worship. Some worship the material world. Others create gods in their minds and even form images of those gods that resemble man, birds, and other animals (Rom 1:22-23). We

¹ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 11.

see this clearly in the Old Testament as we read of the gods of the Egyptians, Hittites, Amorites, and so on. And some have imagined that these are genuine gods. Perhaps the God of Israel is better than the gods of the Egyptians, they might say, but the gods of the Egyptians are real, great, powerful gods.

But Psalm 96 just cuts through all of that, telling us that the made-up gods of the nations are “worthless idols.” There is one God, who (as we read in verse 5) “made the heavens.” There is one true God who created all things. And of course, the psalmist didn’t have to limit himself to “the heavens” as that which God made. As we read in Psalm 95, he also made the mountains, land, sea, and all things. But my guess is that he mentions “the heavens” because that’s where unbelievers think their gods dwell. They say to us, “Our gods dwell in the heavens,” and we answer, “The God we worship—the one true God—made the heavens.”

I noted when we looked at Psalm 95 that the repeated recognition in the Old Testament that what sets the God of Israel apart from all other gods is that God alone is creator of all things, ruler of all things, and, therefore, alone is due our worship. Well, here is Psalm 96 that psalmist tells the nations that God alone is the creator. He created the heavens. What about his rule? Well, we see in verse 10, the psalmist writes, “Say among the nations, ‘The Lord reigns!’” God alone is ruler.

And the psalmist concludes, then, that if God alone is creator and ruler, then God deserves the worship of all peoples. That’s what we read in verses 7-9 the psalmist calling all peoples to ascribe to the Lord glory and strength, worship him in the splendor of holiness, tremble before him, and ascribe to him “the glory *due* his name.”

There is one true, real God. He alone created all things and rules over them. And therefore he deserves the worship of the nations. He is due their praise. That’s the first reason we must proclaim his glory among the nations in the form of bearing witness to Jesus Christ. There is only one true God, and he is due the praise of all peoples. Second, there is only one savior, and salvation is only found in him.

There is only one savior, and salvation is only found in him

Notice this in verse 2. The psalmist writes, “Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.” Ever since Genesis 3 mankind has been in need of salvation. In Adam, we are all born into this world condemned and heading toward death and judgment. Now, by Genesis 12, the Lord called Abraham to himself and declared that he’d raise up a people from him, a people through whom came the Messiah. But the Lord’s intent was never to save people from one nation only. In fact, God said to Abraham, “In you shall all the nations be blessed” (Gen 12:3), which Paul tells us in Galatians 3:8 was God preaching the gospel beforehand to Abraham, showing that he would justify the Gentiles by faith. Therefore, all peoples have hope of salvation.

And yet, they don’t get to choose their path of salvation or who will be their savior. There is one savior. He is the God-man, Jesus Christ. And there was a time in history when people could be

ignorant of who Jesus is. Prior to Jesus' coming, people trusted in God's promises to bring his savior into the world but did not know the name Jesus, of course, because he hadn't come. But once Christ came, all that changed. This is Paul's point in Acts 17:30-31, as he said, "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

There is one savior, and it's the one through whom the one true God has revealed himself—Jesus. He lived, died, and was raised, and ignorance is no longer okay. People must bow the knee to Jesus and him alone.

So the good news is that all peoples everywhere can be saved from their sins, but they can be saved only through our Lord, for he alone is God. And he alone is savior. In Isaiah 45, which contains very similar themes to Psalm 96, the Lord is declaring that the world worships worthless idols, and then he declares, "Turn to me and be saved all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: 'To me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear allegiance.'"

That's the message of the Old Testament to the nations—turn to the one true God and be saved because he alone is God and savior. And of course, it's not by mistake that Paul takes up these very words from Isaiah 45 in which God had declared that because he alone is God and savior every knee would bow and tongue confess he is Lord and apply them to Jesus, telling us in Philippians 2:10-11 that "every tongue [will] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." Salvation is found in Christ alone. And that's why we must declare to all peoples the message that Jesus lived, died, and was raised so that they might repent, believe, have forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and offer worship to the one who is due their praise.

But there is one final reason we must proclaim God's glory among the nations. The one true God is coming to judge all peoples.

This one true God and Savior is coming to judge all peoples and every person

Verses 10-13 bring in an additional element as to why the nations must worship the Lord—he is coming in judgment. In verse 10 we read, "Say among the nations, 'The LORD reigns!' Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity." In other words, we must declare God's glory in the form of his gospel to all peoples because judgment is coming. That's a summary of verse 10.

This world won't just continue on as is and people live their lives without consequences. Judgment is coming. The one true God who is due the praise of all peoples will one day come and judge all peoples—the very ones who should have offered him their lives in worship. And those who haven't bowed the knee to Jesus in faith will face merciless judgment. That's the only way I know how to describe God's judgment as pictured to us in the Scripture—merciless.

Multiple times the Lord's judgment in the Old Testament is described as being "without pity," and the images of judgment at the day of Christ's return are more terrible than any Old Testament scene of judgment you can find. And every person will stand before Christ.

And I stress "every person" in addition to all peoples because I don't think the psalmist is telling us that God will judge all peoples in order to send the message that we'll face judgment as a group. How'd this nation do or how'd that nation do? Did that family worship Jesus? What about that family? No, the Scripture makes clear that we'll stand before the Lord in judgment as individuals. Paul declares in Romans 2:6 that we'll stand "each one" in judgment before the Lord. And in that day, if you are not a worshiper of the Lord Jesus Christ, having bowed the knee in repentance and faith, you'll be condemned.

But there is hope for sinners. That's why we noted the second point. There is salvation in Christ, where we can be forgiven. And it's why the last three verses of the psalm read as they do. I mean, these verses end with the reminder we just saw in verse 10—the Lord is coming to judge the earth and to judge in righteousness. But, interestingly, that truth is surrounded by celebration and rejoicing. The psalmist writes, "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 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" (vv. 11-13).

If our Lord is coming to judge, then why in the world would the heavens, earth, sea, fields, and trees be exulting and rejoicing? Well, the answer is that for those who have bowed the knee to Jesus, his coming in judgment is their salvation. For those who recognized that all other gods were worthless idols and turned to trust in Christ as their God and savior, his coming is a coming to bring us our full and final salvation. On that day, Jesus will split the sky, and in that instant, those believers who have died in Christ will be raised from the dead in glorified bodies. We who have trusted in Christ and are alive will be given glorified bodies in an instant. We will stand before the Lord, with unbelievers on one side and believers on the other. And the unbelievers—as I've already noted—will be thrown into the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels. But believers will be welcomed into the Lord's kingdom, prepared for them before the foundation of the world so that we may be with our Lord forever.

But something else will happen as we are raised to life. The earth itself, having been subjected to futility and corruption (so that we have famines, droughts, earthquakes, thorn, and thistles) will itself be set free from its bondage to decay, and it will be new as well. And so it's not just believers, but the earth itself, that are groaning for the Lord to come and judge the earth.

And so we must bear witness to this whole world that Christ deserves their worship. We must take the gospel to the nations because there is one true God, in whom alone is salvation, and who will come to judge. Therefore, let's worship our Lord and be faithful to proclaim his glory among the nations. Amen.